



Excerpt from
WHAT PAUL MIGHT SAY TODAY
Critiques in the Practical Theology of 21st Century Western Christendom

Introduction

People worldwide hate Israel and Christianity with equal vehemence. This is nothing new. The world has harbored contempt for the Jews since their slavery in Egypt. They have been maligned and persecuted for thousands of years by several nations. Once Christianity was introduced, the world quickly turned its disgust toward it as well. For hundreds of years, successive Roman Emperors sought to exterminate this pesky, offensive offshoot of Judaism. But Christianity continued to grow, spreading farther and farther throughout the known world. As it spread from one kingdom to another, various social and political leaders would fuel this same hatred ignited by the Roman Empire.

The world's loathing of Israel and Christianity continues with equal passion to this day. In our modern, global society it is deemed politically incorrect to express prejudice toward various minorities: women, races, the aged, handicaps, even sexual pervert get a pass. It is unacceptable to make prejudicial remarks toward followers of any of the many world religions. It is, however, deemed perfectly acceptable to denigrate Jews and Christians. It is a common theme among comedians, protest groups concerning almost any subject matter, media personalities, and Hollywood.

On the whole, the world not only tolerates, but takes great pleasure in the numerous world religions; but there is something about Judeo-Christian theology that offends them. Of course, from the biblical perspective this is not surprising. It

was predicted to be so. Jesus said the world would hate us just as it hated him, and just as it hated the prophets before him. But what is the impetus for this hatred? What drives the world, from one generation to the next, to hate Jews and Christians with such venom?

It is not so much the answer to this question but our response to the hatred we receive that prompts the inclusion of this chapter among these critiques of modern practical theology. The answer to the question of their hatred is a matter of biblical theology, but our response to this hatred is a matter of practical theology, and our response is inappropriate. Largely, the Western Church has responded to the world's intolerance by attempting to pass legislation that would prevent it. Chapter 2 of this work, *The Church and Socio-political Activism*, addresses this issue more fully, arguing that it is not the role of the Church to affect socio-political reformation. With that understanding, we now digress slightly from the theme of practical theology to discuss the underlying biblical theology associated with the practical. To fully understand this hatred and our appropriate response to it, we must understand its source.

Very few, who harbor this hatred, fully understand their motivation, and therefore cannot provide a clear explanation. If we took a survey, asking the question: "Why does the world, at large, hate Judaism and Christianity?" We might expect some unfounded, biased answers. Various ostensible reasons can be conjured up, but there is no sound logic behind them. We might hear: "They are hypocrites" (as if

other belief systems harbor no hypocrites). “They are legalistic” (as if other belief systems have no behavioral guidelines). “They are narrow-minded, too intolerant of others” (as if those passing this judgment themselves are not being narrow minded).

Ask this same question to believers and they may reason that because man is at enmity with God, and because the Jews are God’s chosen people, with whom He has a special covenant, the world therefore is at enmity with Israel. Christians, likewise, are chosen by God, the recipients of God’s mercy; thereby making them the world’s enemies as well. All of this is true, but it is not the impetus for the world’s hatred of Judeo-Christian theology.

There is something more personal, more immediate, and more insidious driving this hatred. It is a doctrine vital to both Judaism and Christianity, and it separates Judeo-Christian theology from every other religion in the world. By the same token, it is the glaring absence of this doctrine that allows for, and even encourages, the world to tolerate and embrace any, or all, of the many other world religions. It is the doctrine of total depravity: *“There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God” (Rom. 3:10-11).*

Offensive nature of Judeo-Christian theology

Other than Judeo-Christian theology, without exception, every world religion provides for personal improvement, the ability to pull one’s self up by the bootstraps, as it were. Every world religion believes man can achieve his particular desired outcome (holiness, a higher plane of spirituality, closeness to his chosen deity, nirvana, paradise, or some other mystical ecstasy); and most importantly,

man can do this on his own, by his own effort through one means or another, which is specific to a particular religion. Specific tasks or rituals differ, as do the desired, blissful outcomes; but the common thread is that, one way or another, man has within himself the ability to achieve his idyllic, spiritual contentment.

In truth, every religion of the world is based on Satan’s lie—the lie that placed the seed of doubt in Eve’s mind:

Ye shall not surely die: For God knows that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil (Gen. 3:4-5).

You will be immortal. You will be powerful. Your eyes will be opened to the wonderful world found in the pleasures of both good and evil. Certainly, as a powerful, all-knowing god you will be above such a thing as death.

At their core, this is the basic mantra of all religions. “You are able. You have the power within you.” This belief in self-empowerment (which is absolutely contrary to the doctrine of total depravity), necessarily negates the biblical doctrine that logically follows total depravity, the doctrine of redemption. A powerful, all-knowing, immortal god does not need salvation. While not all the world religions overtly claim deity for their followers, all of their theologies coincide with the implications of Satan’s lie: “You shall not surely die,” you shall be empowered to make your own destiny. It is here, their common belief in man’s ability to achieve spiritual contentment, at which the seemingly subtle, menacing doctrine of total depravity disturbs the purpose of every world religion.

It offends the non-religious populous as well. For they too believe in man’s ability to achieve his desired happiness and fulfillment; even if their desire is not the

mystical pursuits of the religious. The doctrine of total depravity contradicts this belief in self empowerment, common to both the religious and nonreligious alike. The doctrine of total depravity makes it clear that man's sinful nature has completely severed his relationship with the Creator, the eternal Spirit, and that man has no ability to repair it. As such, try as he may, man is prohibited from accessing the paradise, the happiness, the spiritual fulfillment or the God he feigns to desire. The doctrine of total depravity predicts the need of a savior, the need for someone to redeem this sorry lot of fallen humanity. Thus, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all"* (Isa. 53:6). This is utterly offensive to those who fancy themselves above such a mean existence. After all, are they not as gods?

You might have taken note that I said, "the God he feigns to desire." Pay close attention to *Romans 3:11*: *"There is none that seeks after God."* The outward show of pious religious rituals may appear to be valid efforts at seeking the Creator, but in truth they are little more than self-centered, repetitive actions; quixotic, ceremonial activities designed to evoke an emotional response and to make participants feel secure. In this respect, they are not dissimilar to the actions of one with an obsessive compulsive disorder. Even the various inward quests for a higher spiritual plane and self awareness are mere, self-serving, mystical journeys, rather than true quests for the Creator, for if these practitioners truly sought the Creator they would find Him: *"I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me"* (Proverbs 8:17). Therefore, it stands to reason that if one appears to be seeking God and yet never comes to the knowledge of God, regardless of the pious

rituals employed, the seeker was never really seeking in the first place, at least not diligently.

Elsewhere, we are told more of this search. *"Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him"* (Heb. 11:6). This passage defines both the God being sought and the seeker. Concerning God, first of all, He is. He is the self existent eternal Spirit, the Creator of all things. Creation itself makes this self-evident:

Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:19-20).

Secondly, God is the rewarder. Thus, by definition, He is a personable God intimately involved with His creation. Concerning these seekers, we see they must trust completely in the reality of both details about God: that He is self existent and an intimately involved gift giver. Furthermore, the seeker must be truly seeking. The Greek term, ἐκζητουσιν (*ekzeetousin*), means to investigate, to search out, to inquire, to crave, to demand, to seek after carefully, diligently.

The explanations in this verse are very clear. The definitions of both the seeker and the sought after are very narrow. The God being sought must be the self existent, personable God who rewards His seekers. The seeker must have complete confidence in God's existence and be a serious, diligent seeker. Casually calling upon "the Man" or the higher power, or any other god that might suit one's fancy, is not enough. Such an exercise in futility does nothing

more than appease one's self-serving quest for mystical adventure.

The world has no problem with man's quest for spirituality, or with man's self-fashioned holiness, or his religious ceremonies, or even his quest for a deity. There is nothing offensive to the world in either the outward display of rituals or the inward quest for a self-serving spiritual journey; but introduce this doctrine in which man does not have the ability to help himself, does not have the ability to find his own happiness, and the offense is made. Then, complete the argument with the idea of a necessary redeemer and the fight is on, for it strikes at the very heart of man's pride. This doctrine of the miserable human condition is the impetus for the world's hatred of Judeo-Christian theology: it wounds their self-image. Then, as if this is not enough, we rub salt in the wound. Telling people they must humble themselves before the Creator is just too much for them. Surely, "*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall*" (Prov. 16:18).

The world loves its own

The doctrine of total depravity shines light on man's darkness. Darkness does not like the light and runs from it. The-man-can-pull-himself-up-by-his-bootstraps philosophy, common to all world religions, does not shed light on man's darkness. Using senses other than sight, these religions cuddle and soothe the darkened human condition, assuring us that all is well, shaping fictional images of happiness in their mind's eye. As such, the world has no reason to hate these religions and every reason to embrace them. Indeed, the world loves them, for "*the world loves its own*" (John 15:19).

As mentioned earlier, and evidenced in the following pages, every world religion (other than Judeo-Christian theology)

provides for man's personal improvement in one fashion or another: a higher plane of spirituality, the ability to achieve holiness, the ability to reach its deity or deities, etc. What follows are brief synopses of the major world religions, their basic beliefs, and their aspirations.

Hinduism

Dating back to before 2000 BC, Hinduism believes in the unity of everything, which is called Brahman. Man's purpose is to achieve enlightenment. This is realized by leaving this plane of existence and reuniting with god, and thus, coming to the realization that we are all part of god. Enlightenment is accomplished through Samsara. Samsara is the reincarnation process in which individuals pass from one body to another in the cycle of birth, life, and death, through all life forms.

One's personal progress towards enlightenment is measured by karma, which is the sum of one's good and bad deeds. The level of one's next reincarnation is determined by karma. Devotion to god, personal sacrifice, and selfless thoughts promote rebirth at higher levels. Bad deeds and bad thoughts demote one's rebirth to lower levels. It is for this reason that Hindus follow an austere caste system to identify each person's standing. The caste into which a person is born is the direct result of the karma from his/her previous life. Those of the highest caste, the Brahmin, are the only Hindus allowed to perform religious rituals or to hold positions of authority within the temples.

Buddhism

Buddhism dates back to 560 to 490 BC. Siddhartha Gautama assumed the title Buddha after reaching enlightenment in 535 BC. He promoted the path to enlightenment in a set of teachings called

The Middle Way, which represents the medium between two extremes: self mortification and hedonism. Buddhists also believe in reincarnation. After several rebirths, once a person releases the attachment to desire and to self, Nirvana is attained. Buddhists do not necessarily believe in god.

Zoroastrianism

A Persian, named Zoroaster founded Zoroastrianism between 600 and 1000 BC. Zoroaster taught an elaborate religion of monotheistic/dualism. He taught that a good supreme god, Ahura Mazda, is in conflict with his evil nemesis, Angra Mainyu—a spirit of violence and death that originated from a different source. The battle between good and evil takes place between these deities at both the cosmic level and within the human consciousness.

Their holy book, the Avesta, advocates social justice, the understanding of righteousness and the cosmic order, and the worship of Ahura Mazda. Prayers and ritualistic ceremonies are conducted before a sacred fire which serves as a symbol of their god. The Zoroastrian life is dedicated to a three-fold path reflected in their motto, “Good thoughts, good words, good deeds.”

Confucianism

The teachings of Confucius (K’ung Fu Tzu or Master Kong) originated about 500 BC. They deal with morality, ethics, and socio-political power. Confucians perform various rituals at different times of life: birth, reaching maturity, marriage, and death. It also stresses several virtues: propriety, etiquette, love among family members, righteousness, honesty, trustworthiness, benevolence towards others, and the highest virtue, loyalty to the state. Although ancestral worship is practiced, the concept of an afterlife is

deemed beyond human comprehension and, therefore, is not to be of concern in this life.

Taoism

Taoism was founded in China by Lao-Tse, a contemporary of Confucius, about 440 BC. This philosophy and religious tradition describes the nature of life and the way to peace by living in harmony with the Tao. Roughly translated, the Tao means the Way, the Path, or even the Principle. The Tao is believed to be the source of everything and an essential force flowing through all life. The objective is to become one with the Tao. Practitioners seek virtue, compassion, moderation, and humility. They believe that people, by nature, are good.

All actions are to be planned in advance and accomplished with minimal effort. As such, Tai Chi, a slow deliberate form of martial art movements, is practiced to balance the flow of energy, or chi, throughout the body.

Taoism sees the universe divided into opposing pairs. Yin (the dark side) and Yang (the light side) symbolize these opposing pairs: good and evil, light and dark, male and female, etc. The adverse actions of humanity upset the harmonious balance of Yin and Yang. As a religion, Taoism has reverence for ancestors and immortals, as well as for various magical divinations.

Shinto

Shinto is an ancient Japanese religion dating back to about 500 BC. Originally a nebulous combination of nature worship, fertility cults, divination techniques, hero worship, and shamanism, it has no known founder and only a loosely ordered priesthood. It has no sacred writings or body of religious laws. Shinto recognizes several deities, or Kami, that are deemed neither good nor bad, and bear little to no

resemblance to the Holy God of monotheism, or even the powerful gods of Western and Middle Eastern polytheism.

Their numerous deities are conceptualized in many forms associated with various objects, creatures, places, foods, rivers, rocks, animals, geographical areas, clans, abstract forces, exceptional people and Emperors, etc. The deity, Amaterasu (Sun Goddess), the ancestress of the Imperial family, is regarded as the chief deity. After death people become spirit-deities and return to the ancestral spirit.

Shinto followers admire creativity and harmonious influences. While they seek peace, sincerity, and truth, and teach that all human life is sacred, at the same time, they believe morality is based on that which is beneficial to the group. They hold to the Four Affirmations: tradition and family; the love and worship of nature as sacred spirits; personal, physical cleanliness; and Matsuri, a festival to honor the spirits.

Sikhism

Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji founded Sikhism about 1500, in the Punjab region of modern Pakistan after receiving a vision of the path to enlightenment and god. He is believed to have been reincarnated in a series of nine Gurus until 1708. The tenth Guru, Gobind Singh, completed the holy text, the Shri Guru Granth Sahib. This holy text contains the hymns and writings of each of these Gurus, as well as texts from various Muslim and Hindu saints. The text is considered the 11th and final Guru.

Sikhism believes in a single, formless god with many names. This god, before whom everyone has equal status, can be reached through meditation. The worship of idols or icons is prohibited. Followers of Sikhism pray several times a day. They adhere to karma and a similar samsara type reincarnation as the Hindus; but they reject the caste system.

Bahá'í

Bahá'í, based on the teachings of Baha'u'llah, emerged in the 1800's. Its followers believe the major religions of the world were originated by a series of nine divine messengers (Moses, Abraham, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad, etc., and finally Bahá'u'lláh). Their messages all came from the one eternal God, the Creator of all things. Each divine messenger established a religion suited for its time and the society in which he lived; thus, they taught different truths. Bahá'í centers around three core principles: the unity of God, the unity of religion, and the unity of humankind. After death, one's immortal soul travels through the spirit world. Through the messages of these prophets, the character of mankind has continued to transform and develop from age to age. The current need of humanity is to establish world peace, socio-economic equity, justice, and the unity of all religions and science. The world will culminate in a single world government practicing Bahá'í.

Islam

Founded in Mecca by Muhammad, Islam dates back to the year 622. Practitioners are called Muslims. Muslims teach there is one God, Allah. Islam is believed to be a continuation of the biblical prophets Abraham, David, Moses and Jesus. However, Islam rejects Jesus' claim to deity. Muhammad was the last great prophet. It was his task to formalize, clarify, and purify the faith by removing erroneous teachings. It is Satan that causes people to sin. Those Muslims who repent and humble themselves before Allah will return to a state of sinlessness and, subsequently, go to paradise after death.

Muslims have five duties, known as the Five Pillars of Islam: reciting the Shahadah—a profession of belief in monotheism and Muhammad; Salat—five

daily prayers prayed while facing the Kaaba in Mecca. Zadat—paying alms of 2.5% of one's total wealth to charity, as well as giving to additional charities for the needy if so desired. Sawm of Ramadan—fasting during the month of Ramadan; and Hajj—a pilgrimage made to Mecca at least once in life if it is a financial and physically possibility.

Hearing they will not hear

Regardless of its show of piety, its ostensible quest for God, or its desire for spiritual enlightenment, what every world religion fails to acknowledge is the basic, yet pertinent, doctrine established in the book of Genesis and upon which Judeo-Christian theology revolves: that humanity has inherited a sinful nature which separates us from God and places us in need of redemption.

While this distinction makes perfect sense to Bible students, the world, and practitioners of the world's religions, struggle with the concept at some level. Reluctant to admit just how offensive this doctrine of total depravity is, they generally fail to acknowledge that this offense is the impetus for their disgust of Judeo-Christian theology. Even those who seem sympathetic toward Israel and Christianity cannot clearly understand it. Cognitively, they can follow the argument, but in their spiritual darkness they cannot fully understand its significance; nor can they fully understand the depths of the world's bias and hatred.

Beyond not fully appreciating the doctrine of total depravity and the related doctrine of redemption via a qualified savior who has the ability to rectify the situation, there is further reason (albeit unwittingly) for the world to plug its ears like a child refusing to listen. Once they have learned the truth of the human condition, and of the Redeemer sent from

God to restore their status, they are accountable for the information. So that, these truths bring "*life unto life and death unto death*" (2 Cor. 2:15-17). For those who accept this Gospel, it means eternal life; for the others it is eternal death. Therefore, they are loath to hear these offensive doctrines, and they loathe those who proclaim them. No act of legislation or court-ordered mandates can change this.

Conclusion

Do not be dismayed when the world hates you and your Judeo-Christian theology. Do not be puzzled when the world finds great pleasure in its religions, even when these religions are wreaking worldwide havoc; for the world loves its own (John 15:19). It is expected. It is predicted. It is useless to try to fight this hatred in the courts, in the halls of Congress, in the media, in the street with picket signs and protests. Jesus told us the world would hate us just as it hated him.

As for Israelites, pray for them. They are the chosen people of God, the people of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with whom God made a special covenant. Although they have temporarily rejected their Messiah, one day soon, Israel will accept Jesus. This too is predicted.