

The subtitle of Ravi Zacharias' book, "Jesus Among Other Gods," is "The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message."<sup>1</sup> This subtitle makes the definitive statement regarding where Zacharias stands in his defense of Christianity. Christianity and its central figure, Jesus Christ, are unique to all other world religions and religious leaders. According to Zacharias, "all religions are not the same. All religions do not point to God. All religions *do not say* that all religions are the same. At the heart of *every* religion is an uncompromising commitment to a particular way of defining who God is or is not and accordingly, of defining life's purpose."<sup>2</sup> Because of Zacharias' background of growing up in India, his presentation of the case for the exclusiveness of the Jesus Christ carries great weight. In building this case, Zacharias uses six statements of Jesus to highlight His divinity and to communicate specific arguments for the truths of Christianity.

The first argument regarding Jesus focuses on the question of his origin—that is, where is Jesus from, or where is his home? This was a common question about Jesus when his earthly ministry began. Jesus was said to have come from Nazareth, which was an insignificant community at that time (see John 1:44-45). His parents were insignificant according to the social structure of the day. However, as his ministry unfolded, Jesus claimed that God – the One and Only Father in Heaven – was his father and that heaven was his home. These were and still are startling claims which no one else has ever made. No religious leader of a major world religion has dared to make this type of statement. Zacharias shows how Jesus "showed the inclusiveness of His love for the whole world. But implicit in that was the exclusivity of His truth, for which they [His disciples] were willing to give their lives. We have reversed Jesus' order. We have

made truth relative and culture supreme and have been left with a world in which wickedness reigns.”<sup>3</sup>

The second argument that Zacharias tackles is to show how Jesus displays the authority behind his claims. One of the most significant statements of Jesus was recorded in John 2:19: “Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.”<sup>4</sup> The skeptics of Jesus’ time asked for signs to show the authority for the things he did and said. Not much has changed in two thousand years. Skeptics still ask for definitive signs. There is a fly in the ointment, though. Zacharias correctly observes that “the tendency of the human heart is to understand that whatever proof is offered at any time in history, we will always demand something else.”<sup>5</sup> Skeptics bash Christians for their “faith” while exalting naturalistic “reason.” Skeptics, though, ask for even more faith. They reason that the universe is “just there” and has no purpose at all, which isn’t a reason whatsoever. The Christian acknowledges the tension between faith and reason because Jesus acknowledged it as well. Zacharias powerfully points out that “Jesus sent a message loud and clear. *We* are His temple. We do not turn in a certain direction to pray. We are not bound by having to go into a building so that we can commune with God. There are no unique postures and times and limitations that restrict our access to God. My relationship with God is intimate and personal. The Christian does not go into the temple to worship. The Christian takes the temple with him or her.”<sup>6</sup>

The third element that makes Jesus unique is his offer to his followers of his own body and blood as nourishment to their souls. Over the years, Zacharias points out, Jesus’ words that “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53) have been greatly mischaracterized. Skeptics have even

claimed that Christians are cannibalistic. Clearly Jesus was communicating a metaphor: “What oxygen is to the body, the Bread of Life is to the soul. Without that bread, all other hungers will be improperly perceived.”<sup>7</sup> Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35) This claim is highly unique, Zacharias contends, among religious leaders. Except Jesus, all other leaders “point to their teaching to show some particular way.”<sup>8</sup> Zoraster, Buddha, and Mohammed were teachers who pointed to a way to live and a set of teachings to follow. In Jesus’ case, he “did not only teach or expound His message. *He was identical with His message.*”<sup>9</sup> All of Jesus’ “I Am” statements are reinforcements of this truth. This is a profound and powerful argument for the uniqueness of Jesus. The act of communion, which Jesus taught his followers to observe as an act of remembrance, is the greatest regular reminder Christians have of Jesus’ complete sufficiency to feed our soul and satisfy our thirst for eternal life.

Zacharias then turns to the age-old debate over the reason and source of suffering and pain in this world. This issue was raised by skeptics to Jesus in the form of the question, “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”(John 9:2) Zacharias observes that there was a question behind the question, which Jesus in his omniscience recognized. Therefore his answer reflects the deep knowledge he has that humans long for an answer to the reason and purpose for suffering. Sure, skeptics have used this issue to take shots at the claim of Christians that God is all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful. Zacharias correctly points out that the problem of suffering is not exclusively a Christian problem, but that “*every* worldview must give an explanation or an answer for evil and suffering.”<sup>10</sup> His evaluation of how other world religions deal

with this question is one of the most potent sections of the book. Zacharias skillfully shows how utterly insufficient and contradictory their worldviews are in relation to their answer to the problem of evil. Only Christianity as a worldview can provide an intellectually and emotionally satisfying theodicy. Jesus words reign supreme, that the greatest purpose for pain and suffering is that “this happened so that the work of God might be displayed.” (John 9:3). Zacharias writes that “we will find out that the real anvil was eternity, that time provided the hammers, and that God’s glory and purpose will be what remains.”<sup>11</sup>

The fifth argument Zacharias raises for the exclusiveness of Jesus among religious figures is the assertion of Jesus of his headship over a Kingdom. The interesting theme Zacharias uses to make his case is the relative silence of Jesus at the hands of his accusers during the last hours before the cross. Under questioning, Jesus eventually asserted that he was King over a certain kind of Kingdom. He declared, “For this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” (John 18:37) Zacharias argues that Jesus “came with a message and a method that address three very significant differences on individuality and society. I speak of conversion, compulsion, and revelation.”<sup>12</sup> The way Christianity speaks about conversion, compulsion, and revelation sets it apart from all other world religions, claims Zacharias. Referring specifically to the contrast between Islam and Christianity, he rightly observes that “in no country where the Christian faith is the faith of the majority is it illegal to propagate another faith. There is no country in the world that I know of where the renunciation of one’s Christian faith puts one in danger of being hunted down by the powers of the state.”<sup>13</sup> Regarding Jesus, his relative silence under

the attack of his accusers said more about their ignorance and sin than if Jesus had vigorously defended himself. Certainly not the way a religious leader's life typically ends.

The final argument Zacharias makes is the argument of Jesus as proof of God's existence. Zacharias also pays homage to the other proofs for God's existence, such as the teleological and the cosmological arguments. He notes that the "difference between a silent world and one in which God has spoken is the dramatic line of division between the theist and the naturalist."<sup>14</sup> Jesus, of course, is the ultimate example of God speaking. Next is the infallible Word of God, which is codified in the Bible. Zacharias expresses great compassion toward the unbelieving naturalists in this final chapter. He does not berate them, but offers this thought almost as a prayer on their behalf: "Perhaps if our naturalists would stop looking only for a gardener, they might be surprised at who they would find, or should I say, at who finds them. They might actually hear Him call them by name also and might truly understand the gardens and the deserts of this world for the first time."<sup>15</sup>

The overall weight of the arguments made in "Jesus Among Other Gods" staggers the opposition. Zacharias speaks to both the intellect and the heart. His international background and historical perspective allows Zacharias to address nearly every reader with great personal passion. In 1 Corinthians 13 we read, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." Zacharias' writing displays the powerful confluence of love and prophetic speaking. His gift of philosophical depth and compassion for all people is unique even among Christian apologists.

## WORKS CITED

International Bible Society, ed. *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. : Zondervan Publishing House, 1973, 1978, 1984.

Ravi Zacharias. *Jesus Among Other Gods*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>4</sup> International Bible Society, ed., *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973, 1978, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods* 61.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.