

IN FOCUS: Jesus's preeminence & public opinion

July 3, 2008

I recently read two stories that grieved me. The first was a front-page article in the *Dallas Morning News*, "What America believes." The story was about recent findings from [The Pew Forum](#) about religion in America.

The survey questioned 36,000 people, asking about religious identification, beliefs and practices. Some information was confusing; 10 percent of atheists and 18 percent of agnostics say they pray every week. While I am encouraged that they pray, I wonder who or what the object of their prayers is.

Other responses were troubling. Only 56 percent believe that religion is very important. Thirty-nine percent attend religious services once a week. Seventy percent believe many religions can lead to eternal life, and 61 percent of Southern Baptists share that view. It is hard to believe that almost two-thirds of Southern Baptists believe there are many roads to God. Perhaps they misunderstood the question and thought it meant other Christian denominations.

The other story that was disturbing to me was the report of a prominent theologian who shared with a group of Baptists his questions about the deity of Christ. He was reported to have said that preachers are becoming more reluctant to preach from the Gospel of John because of its emphasis on Jesus' deity than the other gospels that emphasize his humanity.

How important is the deity and sole-sufficiency of Christ? Are there many roads that lead to God?

Scripture and historical Christianity always have asserted that the full deity and full humanity of Christ are foundational to our faith. The church has echoed the statement of Peter that “there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

In the first chapter of Colossians, we read that Jesus is the image of the invisible God (v. 15) and “it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in him” (v. 19). In verse 22, we are instructed that he has reconciled us in his fleshly body through death.

It is difficult for our finite minds to understand, but the gospel does not make sense unless we accept that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Jesus is the Logos, the pre-existent. All things were created through him and for him. “He (Father) rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”

There are many biblical issues we interpret differently; however, if Jesus were not fully God who became fully man to rescue us from our sinfulness through his death and resurrection, then Christianity is a hoax. Our faith and our preaching are in vain.

We do not have the option of creating a Jesus who reflects our personal interests and cultural acceptance. Either Jesus is who he said he is, or Christianity is just another man-made religion with empty promises and pipe dreams.

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead!” (1 Corinthians 15:20)
Thanks be to God!

Randel Everett is executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board.