

# OPEN FORUM

I appreciated the March/April issue very much. Linda Hileman stated that a counselor who sees a large number of clergy and clergy spouses “says that United Methodist clergy-wives are the angriest people he sees.” For 20 years I was a clergy-wife. I have served as a pastor for three decades. I served for six years as a district superintendent, [so] I have experienced many of the things United Methodist clergy families experience. Why are we “the angriest”?

Clergy from other traditions and their families certainly understand “living in fear of our own congregations,” having no one to trust with our imperfections and pain. Clergy from other traditions have to move when a contract is not renewed. United Methodists are not unique in loneliness, isolation, frequent uprooting.

Where we are unique, I think, is the connection. This means in practical terms that we know each other to a greater degree than congregational system clergy and families do. We can watch over each other in love, but I think we also watch over each other with suspicion and competition. Clergy-wives (and husbands) know, to a greater degree than non-UM clergy-wives (and husbands), the fellow clergy being considered for appointment in the

closed system of the annual conference. “The system” is embodied in the bishop and district superintendent. When the pastor does not receive an appointment the family hoped for, the family may resent the pastor who did receive that appointment. The family has representatives of “the system” to hold accountable—the bishop and the superintendent. The system, the connection, is supposed to take care of its pastors and their families. This disappointed expectation may be the source of our extra anger.

Maybe this is accurate, maybe not. Ms. Hileman is surely right to urge us to make connections ourselves and to become spiritually, emotionally, and mentally healthy.

**Jeanne Devine**  
San Antonio, TX

I am the 82-year-old widow of a retired United Methodist minister. I wept when I read your March/April issue of *Circuit Rider*. We retired nearly 25 years ago and I am still the angry people pleaser you speak of. Maybe half a dozen of our several thousand congregants would have any idea that is so.

I adored my husband, but Mary Winkler has my deepest sympathy. I note that in the media she is still “the preacher’s wife.” Are we not persons?

**Mary Lou Powell**  
Gulf Shores, AL

Thanks for the May/June 2007 issue of *Circuit Rider*. I found all of the articles interesting and helpful, and the overall content showed considerable balance. It would be wonderful if, as we approach elections to General and Jurisdictional conferences this summer, we could put some of our baggage around such passages as John 14:6 aside and focus on our basic tenet of Christian love. As Rebekah Miles stated, “How can we . . . offer a more graceful witness of Christ’s love . . .?”

**Alan Carroll**  
Lebanon, OH

Thank you so much for the May/June issue of *Circuit Rider*. I found the breadth of the contributors’ response to

John 14:6 helpful, informative, and very “United Methodist.”

**Mark S. Bollwinkel,**  
Los Altos, CA

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I appreciated the thoughtful and diverse articles on John 14:6. Rebekah L. Miles suggests that there are three different ways of thinking about people of other faiths: the pluralist, exclusivist, and inclusivist. The same Paul Knitter that she refers to in one of her footnotes, offers a fourth way of thinking which he calls a “mutuality model.” This model asserts that Christians can dialogue with people of other religions, trustful that wherever there is truth it is of God and from God. This does not mean that we are all saying the same thing or that all religions are equally valid. It does mean that God’s grace, love, and truth are revealed in all religions. It does mean that, as one theologian said, we are all ‘inspired by a common lure toward wisdom’ as we walk together in mutual spiritual journeys.

I would also suggest that if there is going to be peace in God’s world, there must be peace among the world religions. The mutuality model, I believe, is the best model to make this happen.

**Bob Blackburn**  
Berlin, WI

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My own interpretation of John 14:6 is that it is the literal truth for me. I know about Jesus, I want to go to the heaven of the Christian God and I believe that it’s necessary for me to follow “the way, truth and life” as revealed in the only authoritative source of understanding that: the Bible.

Since I believe this is the best approach toward Christian heaven for me, I believe it’s also likely to be the best for everyone else, and I encourage them to adopt it. Having invested some study in the other faith traditions and in non religious approaches, I can put up a fairly fervent and logical witness in favor of that. Ecumenicalism means getting along with others of different beliefs, but it doesn’t mean that Christians (or those others) cannot share their beliefs in the hope that

we may be joined in one faith

Clearly, many of those other traditions and approaches either have other afterlife destinations described in their holy writings or they have nothing to indicate that somehow they have an alternate route to the Christian heaven. Therefore, to suggest that other belief systems will necessarily lead to it is wishful thinking. The same Bible which describes that heaven also clearly says that faith in Christ is required for salvation. Even the “sheep of other pastures” (John 10:16) must follow Christ’s commands.

There is one scriptural “loophole” which I did not see cited in the articles. Revelation 20:12 says, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.” (NIV) Following verses reveal the possibility that some persons may have done something worthy enough to be included in those books and judged acceptable to avoid hell and therefore presumably to enter heaven. But beyond that, the only hopes we can offer to someone who is grieving the loss of a non-Christian are the possibilities of either a deathbed confession of faith or that perhaps God’s love and grace may somehow be extended. Neither, of course, are assured.

Rev. Trawick said it best in his article, “What if there really is only one way?,” when he says that John 14:6 reveals both the greatest joys and greatest heartaches of the evangelical Christian. I believe he also offered the best approach to deal with them: truthfully.

**Joe Lawson**  
Coldwater, MS

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What a fine issue! John’s Gospel was written much later and reflects the development of Christology not present in the other Gospels . . . I have to affirm (with the Jesus Seminar scholars) that much that John has Jesus say, Jesus did not say. Jesus never talked about himself as he does in John. He did not give long speeches. And Jesus did not have the

Christology of the turn of the century.

The Johannine community joined the Jesus of history with the Christ of faith. Christ, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Messiah, was the redemptive and reconciling activity of God found in the Jesus story. This led to some typical oriental hyperboles. Jesus was not just the Son of God or begotten Son of God, as were all the Davidic kings, he was the only begotten Son. In John 14:6, Jesus was not a way to God, he was the only way.

“Except through me”? Who is this “me”? The Jesus of history or the Christ of faith? Christ is more than Jesus. Christ is that activity of God represented in the Hebrew Scripture as well as in the Jesus story. Christ is that light that has been part of humanity since the beginning, that awareness of the other, that consciousness of a dimension of life more than what we know with our physical senses. It is the presence of that which Wesley referred to as prevenient grace, that love present even before we know it.

The “through me” of John 14:6 is more than through Jesus of Nazareth. It is that to be sure, but the “me” includes the larger dimension of the Christ or the activity of God from the beginning. The narrow exclusivism of 14:6 needs the corrective of 10:16. “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold . . .” This opens the way to a pluralism or universalism that enables us to embrace the integrity of other religions and other religion’s way to wholeness of life or salvation.

The “me” is the presence and activity of God that I have found in and through Jesus of Nazareth but others have found also in their own faith traditions. The issue is not exclusivity, my way or the only way, but inclusivity because of the Universal One who has not let that Self be without witnesses among any people.

**George M. Ricker**  
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Concerning the articles in the May/June issue, I have a question. Have you ever known anyone who came to the Father except through the Son?

**V.E. Maybray**  
Western Pennsylvania Conference

I appreciated the focus of your May/June issue on “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” but several writers display a woeful ignorance of other faiths. I agree with Maxie Dunnam that we must uphold the uniqueness of Jesus, but that does not mean we have a monopoly on him. Some Jews, Jains, and Hindus study the Gospels more carefully than some Christians do. Muslims, Bahais, Sikhs, Unitarian Universalist, and many others revere Jesus, though not necessarily the same way that most United Methodists do. Some of them, in fact, have a higher Christology than most of us.

Nor is Dunnam right in assuming that Buddhists are not Christian. Buddhism, like yoga and Native American spirituality is more a practice than a theology: you can be Jewish or Christian or an atheist and be a good Buddhist. One local Catholic priest is also a gifted roshi who teaches Zen meditation. Some Buddhists and Unitarian Universalists are also Christians, though I have noticed that they tend to be more broadminded than most of the rest of us.

Jesus knew enough about Samaritan doctrine to argue theology with the woman at the well. We cannot hope to be the least bit effective in mission and evangelism—and we cannot claim to follow him—if we misrepresent other faith communities.

**Thomas W. Goodhue**

Executive Director, Long Island Council of Churches, Hempstead, NY

The May/June issue was thought-provoking and stimulating; I appreciate the insights each author offered. Here’s yet another perspective from the great Methodist E. Stanley Jones, who comments on John 14:6 in his book *Christ At The Round Table* (paraphrased): “When Jesus says ‘I am the way,’ He is saying something that is universally obvious, something that is written into the constitution and structure of not only universal law but also human relationships: there is a right way and a wrong way. All the other world religions or self-help philosophies point to their methods and

say, ‘This is the way,’ but only Christianity points to a Person and says ‘He is the way.’” It then becomes a matter of a relationship to God rather than a philosophy about God.

As a 50- year missionary in India, his practice was to have roundtable discussions with representatives of all the other living faiths in India. One of them asked point-blank, “Aren’t there other ways or

paths to God?” His reply was, “It is not that God couldn’t or wouldn’t make or accept other ways, He made the way to Himself as simple as possible by making only one way; there just isn’t any other way, because there isn’t any other Christ.”

**Alex Borsos, Jr**

Greater New Jersey Annual Conference

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