TOUGH QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD – BILL NICHOLS
CHAPTER 1: IS THERE ONLY ONE TRUE RELIGION?

True and False Assumptions:
True: "Religious exclusivity is the cause of most wars and conflicts."
False: "The idea of only one true religion is the height of arrogance." "All religions are the same – attempts to find God."

Exclusivity: One of the biggest criticisms against Christianity.
An Event: Muslim cab driver, "Do you believe that Jesus Christ was God in flesh?" "Then you are an infidel."
The Issue: Virtually all religions believe we have "the truth." Exclusivity usually leads to feelings of superiority, then it progresses downward to marginalization, oppression, abuse, and finally violence.

The Classic Answers/Approaches to dealing with the idea of one true religion, one true set of beliefs:
Since you believe your faith is true (correct), how should you relate to people with other beliefs?

1. **The Closed-Door Approach**: Emphasize avoidance, outlaw contact, isolation

   Assumptions: Less contact equals more purity. Truth will win. God will prove who's right.
   Examples: Communist China, Nazi Germany, Jim Jones Cult, Isolationist, segregationist, fundamentalism
   Biblical Difference: Jesus opposed separatism but initiated contact and dialogue (ILL – Jesus went to the synagogue)

2. **The Skeptical Approach:** Emphasizes belittling, pseudo-intellectualism, faith based agnosticism

   Assumptions: All religions only see part of spiritual truth. God is unknowable and impersonal. Can't know.
   Parable of the 3 blind men and the elephant: trunk, leg, side.
   Biblical Difference: Jesus gave witness to a heavenly father, who created all and will communicate with anyone.

3. **The Mystical Approach:** Emphases anti-public, contemplative, spiritual vs. physical

   Assumptions: Religion is hurtful and dangerous when public. We should keep our faith private.
   Reality: What is religion? A way of explaining: our origins, our purpose, ethics, right and wrong, after death.
   Example: Tom said, "We should stop helping the poor. The strong will survive." Jan disagrees, "The poor are our responsibility. They have a right to a decent standard of living." Who's right? Is faith private?
   Biblical Difference: Jesus said that we are our brother's keepers. Good Samaritan.

4. **The Dialogue-Witness Approach**: Emphases respect, dialogue and shared witness

   Assumption: Truth is found through a relationship with God, who is revealed best through Jesus, as seen in the Bible and experienced through his creation and his people in history. Honest, humble dialogue strengths that relationship.

   Jesus' approach emphasized:

   a. Humility: Seek to remove mutual misunderstandings about authentic Christianity. Accept criticism, questions.
      (Importance of a clear, simple understanding and explanation of our faith)
   b. Dialogue: Seek to exchange witness, experiences, cross-questioning and listening. Clarify presuppositions.
      (Importance of being open not closed-minded, listening, asking, learning. Can we learn anything?)
   c. History: Seek to give a historical, not just cultural perspective. Accept failures and contributions.
      (Importance of being factual, honest and consistent not anecdotal and prejudice)
   d. Grace: Seek to learn from each other. Express beliefs, feelings and actions. Affirm any common values.
      (Importance of being gentle, kind, forgiving and building friendships and not just winning debates)
   e. Prayer: Seek to follow the leadership of God, who is active in our lives. Pray for one another.
      (Importance of caring about others, including those who have different beliefs and are against us)

   One true religion? Yes. Jesus had a clear position but not an "exclusive-prideful attitude."
   The person of Jesus, the son of the living God of the Bible, is our understanding of truth.

   Illustration:
   If you came into my room filled with an air-born killer bacteria that causes death in one hour unless you take an antibiotic shot that I have. If I said, "I know this works," would you chance looking for another cure? Example:

   Illustration:
   Francis Collins, The Language of God" head of Human Genome Project – DNA mapping of body.
   Brilliant student-skeptic, became agnostic, then atheist. Became Christian during project. Personal experience as doctor of Christian woman dying of cancer. All religions are built on a dominate or defining experience.