

Minister's Message – August 2011

Majority Opinion vs. Truth

'If you keep on worrying like that you will give yourself an ulcer'. This comment was widely heard just thirty years ago because it was thought peptic stomach ulcers were caused by stress, spicy food and acidic food. Medical treatment was based upon this accepted cause. Dr Barry Marshall thought otherwise. Others scientists ridiculed his theory until he took the drastic step of infecting himself with the bacteria which he believed caused ulcers. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for proving that the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* causes ulcers.

Marshall's experience in the realm of science is by no means rare. When Copernicus first proposed 'heliocentrism', the idea that the earth revolves around the sun, he was afraid of a backlash from the authorities. The majority view at the time was that the sun revolves around the earth. Many other scientific discoveries have proven accepted knowledge wrong. Many great scientists have been a lone voice in the crowd.

We should be wary of the phrase 'the majority of scientists agree' or 'all the experts in the field agree'. Just because the majority agree on something does not mean it is true – as the experience of Marshall and Copernicus show. When something is true we do not need to say 'the majority of experts agree'. Do we hear it being said 'scientists agree that *Helicobacter pylori* causes ulcers'? No! Because the experiments of Dr Marshall proved this bacteria causes ulcers. Advice and treatment for ulcers is now based on this biological truth. Majority opinion may count in politics, but not in science. Majority opinion may count in economics, but not in religion. Religion is not a numbers game; it is a search for truth – or should be! Because some religions are becoming popular people think this is the way to go. Others say 'this religion works for me so it is the best' – for a while anyway! Others claim that the antiquity of their religion makes it more reliable. Some say their ancestors followed this religion so it must be good.

Are you a Christian because it is the most popular religion? Are you a Christian because your ancestors were Christians? Are you a Christian because you live in a Christian country? A Hindu man once told me that the very soil of India was Hindu soil. He said everyone born and living in India must be a Hindu. We find similar beliefs in Old Testament times.

The apostle Paul wrote 'Let God be true and every man a liar' (Romans 3:4). Just because the Jews did not believe in Jesus did not mean his claims were not true. Jesus said '*I am the way the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me*' (John 14:6). Jesus is the truth. Will you maintain your Christian faith if you are the last person in the family, in the country or in the world to believe in Jesus?

'What is truth' asked Pilate. Jesus was ready to tell him but he did not wait to hear (John 18:38). Like many today, Pilate did not want to know the truth. His proud heart felt better searching. 'What is left' people say 'when we have the truth'. What is left is the peace of certainty, the peace of Jesus Christ. 'Seek and you shall find' said Jesus. You will find the greatest treasure there is to be found in this world and the next – Jesus is the truth.

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