

## **Meeting the Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

### **The challenge of pluralism or multiculturalism: How the culture views religion**

**Intro:** We would have to say the vast majority of people in our country over the past 200 years or so were professing Christians. Even now “Christianity” (in the modern historical sense) is still the majority faith in our country; and Protestant faiths are the majority among professing Christians.

But as the country has continued to be open to peoples from other parts of the world, we have seen a sizable increase in our population of people who have embraced and practice other world religions such as Islam, Hinduism, or Buddhism.

Because of the diverse religious landscape in the world and in our country, many people are advocates for religious pluralism. That philosophy is growing more popular and so today we talk about why that is a challenge for Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **What we mean by religious pluralism**

*Religious pluralism is the notion that all religious belief systems and philosophies are of equal validity.*

It argues that all religions provide a genuine encounter with the “Ultimate;” and thus all are adequate even if one religion may be better than another.

Religious pluralists contend that all religions produce the same moral result in people; and thus are equally salvific (saving).

Religious pluralists are quite vocal in their opposition to what they call exclusivism, the idea that there is only one true religion and that all others are false religions. They claim that Christians in particular are intolerant, narrow-minded, and bigoted in advocating Christianity as the one and only true religion. It is, in their view, a form of intellectual imperialism which seeks to impose its will on all other people.

*Multiculturalism is the idea that American culture (with its historical Judeo-Christian heritage) has historically been neither superior to nor preferable over any other culture in the world, and that all cultures—regardless of basic religious, moral, ethical, and spiritual beliefs and practices—are equally credible, viable representations of proper behavior and living.*

Multiculturalism actually denigrates American civilization as inferior to the other cultures of the world, demonizing it as oppressive, coercive, and exploitive.

*Let’s focus on the concept of religious pluralism and the challenge that it presents to Christians.*

#### **Why religious pluralism is problematic and wrong**

*It is founded upon the principle that absolute truth does not exist.*

Both multiculturalism and pluralism affirms that absolute truth does not exist. Both systems embrace the self-contradictory notion that truth is relative, and that right and wrong depend upon the subjective assessments of fallible humans.

Pluralism embraces the politically correct idea that whatever people choose to believe is, indeed, correct and good—at least for them! But of course this is antithetical to the gospel claim that truth is available to those who follow Jesus:

*“Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”” (John 8:31–32)*

***It affirms that contradictory positions can all be right.***

Pluralism defies sound logic. The truth is, there is very a little upon which all religions would agree, even the nature of what is the ultimate reality.

Christians believe in a single personal God manifested in three persons.

Moslems believe in one divine person and deny the deity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Hindus embrace a pantheistic view of the ultimate manifested in many gods and goddesses.

Buddhists worship no god at all.

One cannot affirm that all of these are true and be logical.

***It substitutes sincerity for reality.***

People often express the idea that if one is sincere, he is also right. I have heard people content that the Moslem is more sincere than many Christians in that he is willing to surrender his life for his faith. But does this make Islam true?

Certainly not! A person may be very sincere, but very wrong. While Paul was persecuting Christians he would later say:

*“AND Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.” (Acts 23:1)*

A person may be willing to die for an unworthy cause; and many have in the service of great evil through the centuries. Their sincerity didn’t make them right.

***It denies the gospel message of the universality of sin and the universal need for the good news of Jesus’ atoning death.***

Paul’s presentation of the gospel in Romans begins with the proof that all people need the gospel because they are sinners.

*“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23)*

Paul follows with the affirmation that Jesus’ blood is available to all sinners to bring about redemption.

*“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;” (Romans 3:21–25)*

***It denies the claims of Jesus as the unique Son of God and makes him equivalent to merely human religious founders.***

One cannot engage in a comparison of the founders of the various religions without being confronted with the unique claims of Jesus to be the divine son of God as opposed to men who acknowledged that they were merely sinful humans.

*“Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.” (John 20:30–31, NASB)*

Pluralism affirms that there is nothing about Jesus that gives him the right to claim exclusive allegiance of all mankind. In contrast Jesus’ apostles said:

*“And 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)*

***It fails to distinguish between the public proofs of Christianity and the private proofs of other religious founders.***

The case for the contrast between the religion of Christ and other religions is clear made known in this series of statements.

How other religions began

Someone had a private idea about God or someone had a private dream about God or someone had a private encounter with an angel. Then that single someone told the rest of the world. This makes other religions impossible to verify since there are no eye-witnesses of the prime event.

How Christianity started

Jesus spent three years doing miracles and teaching publicly. Jesus was executed publicly. Jesus was buried and rose from a public tomb publicly. Jesus showed that he was alive publicly. Then it was the public that told the rest of the world. Christianity is the world’s most testable religion.

Peter made clear reference to public proofs in the form of signs that attested to Jesus’ approval by God.

*“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—” (Acts 2:22, NASB)*

***It nullifies the missionary mindset of the religion of Christ.***

Because of the truth claims of Jesus as the unique son of God and because His death is upheld as the only solution for the sins of humanity, Jesus gave His disciples the mission to proclaim the message of the gospel to the whole creation.

*“And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.” (Mark 16:15)*

The commission of Jesus implies that the gospel is the exclusive hope of all people.

***It ignores the correlation between the faith and form we see in free societies.***

What people often do not see is that the freedoms that we enjoy in this country are possible because of the moral controls that come through Christianity being the dominant faith.

Our founding fathers could clearly see the relationship between that freedom and faith. Consider thoughtfully the words of Founding Father, Jedidiah Morse, who in 1799 articulated the thinking of the Founders and most early Americans regarding the importance of Christianity to America’s survival:

***To the kindly influence of Christianity we owe that degree of civil freedom, and political and social happiness which mankind now enjoy. In proportion as the genuine effects of Christianity are diminished in any nation, either through unbelief, or the corruption of its doctrines, or the neglect of its institutions; in the same proportion will the people of that nation recede from the blessings of genuine freedom, and approximate the miseries of complete despotism (1799). (AP, What Good Things Can You Say About Islam? By Dave Miller, Ph.D.***

You have to ask yourself, “What kind of freedom would we have in this country should it come under the religious influence of say, Islam? To look at the governments of those countries is to know the answer to that question. Has Islam in any place produced a nation tolerant of other faiths?

Because in the USA there is freedom from religious persecution, both Christian churches and Islamic mosques can exist; however in Islamic controlled countries Christianity is illegal. In Islamic nations a person who converts to Christianity is executed.

In Sharia law a man may beat his wife as punishment for disobedience

Adulterers are to be scourged with 80 stripes.

**What we should do about it**

***We must affirm the unique claims of Jesus as the exclusive Savior of mankind.***

Through the years I've seen that Christians are more influenced by religious pluralism than they may be aware. It is not uncommon to hear Christians suggest that people who know nothing of Jesus may be saved by sincerely following whatever religion dominates their culture.

Contrast that with Jesus own words:

*"Jesus \*said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." (John 14:6, NASB)*

***We must proclaim the truth with conviction, but not arrogance.***

For many people this is practically impossible. To say that something is true is tantamount in some people's minds to being arrogant.

*"but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;" (1 Peter 3:15, NASB)*

***We must take seriously the great commission***

What stands behind Jesus' statement, "Go into all the world" is the truth about who He is and what He came to earth to do for all.

If we really believe Jesus is who he claimed to be, then everyone needs to know about him.

**Conclusion: Pluralism may be politically correct; but it is Scripturally incorrect. Let us stand upon the unique claims of our Savior and that faith which He proclaimed to be intended for the whole world.**