

Are all Religions the Same?

Are all religions basically one? Don't they all have the same root? Aren't we all the same in our awe for the mystery of the universe? Aren't we all seeking to unify mankind? How can we discuss the claims of the Christian faith in a world that talks seriously about the pending doom day?

Dennis L. Meadows, a business professor, in a study sponsored and published by the Club of Rome, an organization of distinguished industrialists, bankers and scientists from 25 different countries, believes that the world cannot survive economic growth. The study insists that unchecked growth can have only one outcome: "A rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity" around the year 2050. So we live in a world of crisis!

Isn't it high time that all religions come together and try to solve the problems we all have in common? Isn't it rather haughty to think in our shrunken world that Christianity alone has the truth and all the other religions are wrong? Isn't it high time that we come together to discover our common humanity and a basis from which to tackle before it is too late?

Currently, Christianity is being confronted by other major religions as never before. Our world has become very small. The mystery of the East has been unveiled through TV., film radio and literature. These contacts in this condensed world of ours brings an inevitable dialogue between religions.

Many, both in the East and the West, are rethinking their positions. In India, great thinkers have tried to reconcile the gospel of Jesus Christ and their ancient holy books. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, India's philosopher president, believed that the conflicting ideologies of our day can be resolved only by creating a spiritual unity, a moral world community. He proclaimed the need for "a universal faith."

Perhaps the best known expression of this spirit of syncretism is Mahatma Gandhi's statement to Joseph J. Doke in January 1908, where he said: "Christendom has a part in my theology. Christ is the radiating revelation of God. But not the only revelation. I don't place Him on a solitary throne."

He found the teaching of Christ very appealing, but stumbled over the cross. He said: "There were moments in my life that I didn't know where to turn. And then I always grabbed for my Bible and in particular for the New Testament and drew strength from its message."

But Gandhi also frankly confessed that he had never found peace. He lamented: "I have never found God, but I will seek Him and keep on seeking Him."

Syncretism is nothing new, but never before has it been so prominently espoused by leading theologians. Many are working on the bringing together of world religions. The

lead idea is that God has many children and varied ways of making Himself known to them, according to their capacity and aptitude.

Modern writers like Robert D. Young. *Encounter With World Religions* (1970) seem to believe that peace and harmony are created in an ideal world by the melting together of various religions. The famous theologian Paul Tillich found the "universal spirit" in many religions.

Some teach that as witnesses and apostles of Jesus Christ we must declare the gospel in word and deed in the realization that God's grace in Christ embraces the heathen already. This trend towards syncretism came in vogue in the 19th Century as a result of higher criticism of the Bible and its consequent undermining of its authority.

In 1893, the first World Parliament of Religions convened in the U.S.A. and more than 150,000 people attended its sessions. The motto of this congress was expressed in the words of Malachi : "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" One of the religious leaders who made a great impression was the Indian Vivekananda. The New York Herald wrote that he was "undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions." The message Vivekananda brought to America was: " Never forget the glory of human nature! We are the great God. Christs and Buddhas are mere little waves of the immense ocean of eternal being. "

When in 1928, the International Mission Council met in Jerusalem, a statement was sent into the world in which great appreciation was expressed for the "spiritual value of other religions."

In 1932, the conference went further than this in the so-called "laity report" that appeared under the title "Rethinking Missions." In this document, missions became an exchange of spiritual experiences, the influencing of one another and the strengthening of the spirit of brotherhood.

In other words, God works through every religion and all roads lead to God. We are faced again with the question: One way to God or many ways? This is of course a vitally important question for each Christian. The historic Christian faith has always maintained that "there could be no legitimate fusion between Christianity and non-Christian religion and philosophies." God can only be approached through Jesus Christ. The Christian message is unique. The truth about life can only be known through the second person in the Trinity-Jesus Christ.

Read Scripture and you'll discover that peace with God can only found through Jesus Christ. Acts 4: 12 declares about Him: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Our generation cries for deliverance. A world is in crisis! But throughout the centuries people have told their stories, and they have tried to grasp for salvation as if it were a hidden treasure. Salvation was wanted from ignorance, death, sickness, poverty, meaninglessness and fear.

Every generation around the world has tried to find peace with God. Man has been reaching for God. But the Christian message is God is reaching for man. In Jesus Christ salvation is unique and different. Man is guilty before God, and only through Christ can his guilt be removed.

Christ brings healing from spiritual disease and deliverance from the coming judgment as well; and true meaning for life can be found only by being in Him.

The theologian who works towards syncretism is playing with pagan fire. He is reaching back across the centuries for pagan Rome. This blending of religions is a fostering of ecumenism like that in the Roman Empire where Emperor Alexander Severus (222-235) encouraged the then existing trend toward syncretism. Alexander Severus is said to have in his chapel statues of Orpheus, Abraham, Alexander the Great, several of the Roman emperors, and Jesus.

Since the church confesses that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, and that no man comes unto the Father but through Him (John 14:6), she must confront the world with all the energy she possesses. We can hear already the alarming sounds of the coming end and through the study of Scripture we know that Christ's coming is near. The church should neither be disobedient to her Lord, her Sender, nor be frightened of the confrontation with the issues of our apocalyptic age. On every continent the church faces paganism and non-Christian religions either old or new. We can no longer think of a Christian West and a non-Christian East. This is outdated.

The church in Canada must face the new and the old paganism head on right here and now and should also be very much aware of the increasing appeal of syncretism. The gospel of Jesus Christ must be spread.

The words of Stephen Neill in *Call to Mission* (Fortress, 1970) remind the church of her abiding task: "The missionary must have no doubt as to the purpose for which he has come overseas. He must be a missionary. That means that, waking or sleeping, he must be dominated by one central concern—that men and women should be brought to Jesus Christ and to find life in him."

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