

CHRISTIANITY IN A RELIGIOUSLY DIVERSE WORLD

Session 2

Pluralism: All Religions Lead to Salvation

Outline

- I. What is Pluralism?
 - a. "All Religions are different paths that lead to salvation."
- II. Perennialism
 - a. "All religions teach the same core truths."
 - b. Philosophical assessment
 - i. We tell religions apart by crucial differences, not by superficial similarities.
 - ii. Perennialism cherry-picks individual teachings out of context.
 - iii. Perennialism actually denies the truth of all other religions.
 - c. Biblical Assessment
 - i. Salvation is to be found in Jesus and no one else. (John 3:18; John 3:36; John 14:6; Acts 4:12)
- III. Unitive Pluralism
 - a. Typical traits
 - i. Most, but not all, religions are "true."
 - ii. Generalized and watered-down "salvation" to fit all religions.
 - iii. Religious truths are relative.
 - iv. Christ is not unique. They deny his deity and resurrection.
 - v. Strong aversion to hell doctrines.
 - b. Example: John Hick's Pluralism
 - i. The universe is religiously ambiguous.
 - ii. God does not reveal himself directly.
 - iii. Christianity is not unique
 - 1. Jesus never taught he was God.
 - 2. The Incarnation is incoherent.
 - 3. The resurrection is a developed myth.
 - iv. Religious experiences are widespread.
 - v. The moral improvement of people reveal which religions are true.
 - 1. All religions claim to save people
 - 2. This is a marker for truth.
 - 3. Salvation is "transformation from being self-focused to being focused on the transcendent reality behind people's religious experiences."
 - 4. "The Real"
 - 5. This "salvation" is manifest in moral improvement.
 - vi. Most religions exhibit the same degree of moral improvement.
 - vii. Therefore, most religions are true.
 - viii. The Real itself is different than the Real as it is experienced. Culture and upbringing create these different experiences, leading to different religions.
 - ix. Christian don't appear any more moral than anyone else.
- IV. Philosophical Assessment
 - a. There are very strong arguments for the Christian God.
 - b. Salvation as moral improvement?
 - i. Moral improvement does not imply truth.
 - ii. The effects of religions are not equal.
 - c. Christian moral merit?
 - i. True vs. Nominal Christians

- ii. Temporal Limitations
 - iii. Christianity Attracts “Bad” People
 - d. Hick’s concept of the Real is contradictory.
 - e. General weakness of Pluralism: Religious believers of every religion have misunderstood their own religions, but the pluralist has understood them correctly.
- V. Biblical Assessment
 - a. Challenges:
 - i. Jesus never taught he was God.
 - ii. Jesus’ deity was a legendary development invented by the early church.
 - iii. The incarnation makes no sense.
 - iv. The resurrection has naturalistic explanations.
 - b. Responses
 - i. The pluralist must prove legendary development, not just assert it.
 - ii. Jesus could hardly have made his deity any clearer.
 - 1. He made claims indicating he was:
 - a. The Messiah (e.g., Mark 8:27-30; Matthew 11:2-6)
 - b. The Son of Man, a divine figure from the book of Daniel, chapter 7. (e.g., Mark 14:60-64)
 - c. The Son of God (e.g., Matthew 11:27)
 - 2. He disclosed his identity through his actions:
 - a. His triumphal entry pointed to him being the prophesied Messiah. (Mark 11:1-11; John 12:12-19)
 - b. He preached about the coming Kingdom of God and that he would have the authority to rule over it. (Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:28-30)
 - c. He put his words on the level of God’s words in the Holy Scriptures. (Matthew 7:28-29; Mark 10:2-12)
 - d. He forgave sins as only God can (Mark 2:1-12).
 - e. He performed miracles on his own authority (e.g., Matthew 9:27-28).
 - f. He exorcised demons on his own authority (e.g., Mark 1:21-27).
 - g. And he received worship (e.g., Matthew 28:17).
 - iii. There are multiple possible ways to understand the incarnation.
 - iv. The resurrection best explains the accepted historical facts.
- VI. Conclusion
 - a. There are strong theistic arguments that disqualify large groups of religions.
 - b. Pluralism leads to incoherent beliefs.
 - c. Pluralism cannot account for the historical and biblical evidence regarding the resurrection and deity of Christ.
 - d. Pluralism does not do justice to the significant differences among world religions.

For Further Reading:

- **Arguments for God and Christianity:** *“On Guard”* or the more advanced version *“Reasonable Faith”* both by William Lane Craig; *“I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist”* by Frank Turek and Norman Geisler.
- **Effects of Christianity on society throughout history:** *“How Christianity Changed the World”* by Alvin J. Schmidt.
- **Basics of Christianity:** *“Mere Christianity”* by C.S. Lewis.
- **Answering common questions:** *“True for You but Not for Me”* by Paul Copan.
- **Historical reliability of the Gospels:** *“What Are the Gospels?”* by Richard A. Burridge; *“Jesus and the Eyewitnesses”* by Richard Bauckham; *“The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition”* by Paul Rhodes Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd.
- **The historical resurrection:** *“On Guard”* or the more advanced version *“Reasonable Faith”* both by William Lane Craig; *“The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus”* by Gary Habermas and Michael R. Licona.