

Religious Pluralism

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM DEFINED

Loosely defined, religious pluralism is a movement of distinct religious groups toward acceptance of their differences in belief; but more significantly, it is an admission that one religion or belief system is not the sole or exclusive source of truth and that all religions offer equally valid answers regarding Who God is and how He relates to creation, especially mankind.

John Hick, a leading proponent of religious pluralism confessed to once converting to Christianity but after studying at various universities and working as a parish priest he relocated in America and worked first at Cornell University and then at Princeton Theological Seminary. By that time in his life Hick had rejected the virgin birth, abandoned evangelical Christianity and embraced religious pluralism. In his autobiography Hick expressed that although religious beliefs differed, they were essentially the same as to their source and effect.

. . . at a deeper level it seemed evident to me that essentially the same thing was going on in all these different places of worship, namely men and women were coming together under the auspices of some ancient, highly developed tradition which enables them to open their minds and hearts ‘upwards’ toward a higher divine reality which makes a claim on the living of their lives.¹

John Hick describes religious pluralism in this way:

God as known to Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and others, represents different manifestations in relation to humanity, different ‘faces’ or ‘masks’ or *personae* of God, the ultimate reality.”²

An influential Roman Catholic pluralist states that pluralist theologians believe in “the possible independent validity . . . of other religious paths . . . Christianity may be ‘one among many’” paths to God.”³

Bishop Melvin Talbert, ecumenical officer of the United Methodist Church, when in an interview with Larry King was asked that if Christianity was the right path, were other religions wrong, replied:

“I believe my God is large enough to be inclusive of all human beings who were created in God’s image, and that includes those religions that are not Christians . . . what we need to do is to be tolerant with each other and not assume that our way is the only way.”⁴

¹ <http://www.philosopherkings.co.uk/hickandpluralism.html>

² John Hick, “A Pluralist View,” in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 39.

³ Paul Knitter, “Dialogue and Liberation,” *The Drew Gateway*, (Spring 1998)

⁴ CNN, Larry King Live (aired March 11, 2003), <http://www.allaboutreligion.org/religious-pluralism.htm>

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Religious pluralism is promoted and advanced by interfaith dialogue.⁵ While religious pluralism is the acceptance that truth exists in more than one belief system, interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative interaction between people of different religious beliefs. This involves interaction in a social agenda, but not exclusively. Interfaith dialogue also involves interaction in prayer and worship.

The Emergent or Emerging Church is a leading force in “alternative worship,” meaning a “rediscovery of ancient and alternative Christian traditions as resources for the present and future.”⁶ This involves interfaith dialogue that is alarming. Rob Bell, Christian leader and former pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan, comments:

This is not the same old message with new methods. We’re rediscovering Christianity as an Eastern religion, as a way of life . . . The Bible is still in the center for us, but it’s a different kind of center. We want to embrace mystery, rather than conquer it.⁷

Meditative prayer, contemplative spirituality, candles, icons, incense, and the prayer labyrinth are only some of the results of interfaith dialogue and a move toward religious pluralism.

The Interfaith Movement has connected religious pluralism with political activism. Former President Barack Obama introduced interfaith prayers at political rallies, and according to David Domke, University of Washington communications professor, “It’s entirely a new frontier of religious politics . . . prayer will be different than what we’ve experienced since Reagan, with a much more substantial interfaith element.”⁸

Since 2007, the WCC has functioned under six programs. The sixth program is of special interest to missions. It is called, “Inter-Religious Dialogue and Cooperation“ and the stated goal is to “promote respectful coexistence and peaceful integration in pluralistic societies.”⁹ To accomplish this goal, the WCC will facilitate “dialogues and cross-cultural encounters on topics like perceptions of ‘the other’ religion . . . engage churches in reflection on what it means to be Christian in a world of many religions.”¹⁰

Morris J. Augustine, writing on behalf of the WCC and expressing the philosophy of the WCC on “Programmes, Inter-Religious Dialogue and Cooperation,” gave the basis for those of all world religions to consider themselves brothers and sisters. He wrote, “During the past century historians, anthropologists, paleontologists and philosophers have uncovered a bountiful treasure-trove of evidence that religions and spiritualities all over our world and in every age are closely related to each other . . . It appears to us that religion in its many forms evolved along

⁵ Interfaith Dialogue is known by other titles such as: *interbelief dialogue*, *interpath dialogue* (to include atheists, agnostics, humanists, and others with no religious faith), *transbelief dialogue*, *interreligious dialogue* (to refer to interaction between different “Christian denominations), and ‘interfaith dialogue (to refer to interaction between different faith groups such as Muslim, Christian and Jew).

⁶ <http://www.alternativeworship.org>

⁷ Rob Bell in a 2004 *Christianity Today* article titled, “Emergent Mystique“

⁸ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>, “The Times of India”

⁹ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/programmes.html>

¹⁰ Ibid

with the human species itself: that “God,” “the gods,” or whatever name is given to the Transcendent Dimension, has revealed Him/Her/It/them-self(s) to all us human beings . . . Though our members hail from all five continents and from most of the great world-encircling religious traditions, we are essentially brothers and sisters.”¹¹

Morris Augustine goes on to say, “We founded an organization of friends who are open to all religious traditions. We simply ‘break bread together,’ in a spirit of mutual respect for each other’s spiritual ways. We strongly feel that there are very solid religious and social scientific reasons for doing this. We decided to call ourselves ‘The Kyoto Cosmos Club’ because we are a group of intellectually, artistically and spiritually-oriented people who feel that our magnificent cosmos, evolving and expanding now for more than thirteen billion years, is the proper perspective from which to look at ourselves.”¹²

Guidelines for Dialogue: In 1977, in Chiang Mai, Thailand, representatives of the WCC drew up “Guidelines on Dialogue with People of living Faiths and Ideologies.” The WCC intends that these guidelines serve as a basis of all dialogue between representatives of different religions.¹³

From the outset, the Guidelines on Dialogue minimize the Scriptures and give a veiled criticism of those who hold the Bible to be the final authority for faith and practice. Conversely, the guidelines encourage the meditative study of “holy books” of other faiths. The WCC states, “We experience both the possibility for common confession of faith and worship together and also the obstacles to Christian unity. We are agreed in giving a vital place in our thinking to Bible study and worship . . . Yet we are also aware of problems concerning the authority of the Bible remaining unsolved among us and of the fact that we are not yet part of one Eucharistic fellowship. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is controversy among Christians about the meditative use . . . of the holy books of other faiths and about the question of common worship between those of different faiths.”¹⁴

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

When the World Council of Churches (WCC) was formed at the first general assembly in Amsterdam on August 23, 1948, it became “the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement whose goal is Christian unity.”¹⁵ What the WCC means by “Christian unity” is Religious Pluralism or in the words of the WCC, “Visible unity in one faith and one Eucharistic fellowship.”¹⁶ When the WCC speaks of “one Eucharist fellowship,” it is embracing (among other world religious beliefs)

¹¹ <http://www.oikoumene.org>, Morris J. Augustine, “An Apologia for the Kyoto Cosmos Club”

¹² Ibid., Morris J. Augustine, STD, Ph.D. is President of the Kyoto Cosmos Club. He is a retired Professor of Literature at Kansai University in Osaka, and he holds doctorates in Catholic Theology and in Phenomenology of Religion with specialization in Buddhism. He spent thirteen years as a Benedictine monk and was ordained to the priesthood in 1960.

¹³ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources>, “My Neighbor’s Faith and Mine”

¹⁴ <http://www.oikoumene.org>, “The Churches and the Church” #13

¹⁵ <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/who-are-we.html>

¹⁶ Ibid

the Roman Catholic Church which holds to transubstantiation.¹⁷ In speaking of the Eucharist, the WCC states:

Many churches believe that by the words of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine of the Eucharist become, in a real though mysterious manner, the body and blood of the risen Christ, i.e., of the living Christ present in all his fullness . . . Some other churches, while affirming a real presence of Christ at the Eucharist, do not link that presence so definitely with the signs of bread and wine. The decision remains for the churches whether this difference can be accommodated within the convergence formulated in the text itself.¹⁸

Dr. Stanley Jedidiah Samartha (October 1920 – July 2001) was an Indian theologian and participant in inter-religious dialogue. He was the first director of the WCC sub-unit “Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies.” Dr. Samartha’s views on religious pluralism reflect those of the WCC at that time and going forward.

The abuse of mission and the doubtful methods used to ‘gain converts’ have been criticized so much recently that one need not refer to them again here. Perhaps much more serious is the attitude implied by some of the words used to describe evangelistic work. It contradicts a dialogue relationship and should be given up. Terms such as ‘evangelistic campaign’, ‘missionary strategy’, ‘campus crusade’, ‘occupying non-Christian areas’, a ‘blitzkrieg’ of missionaries, ‘sending reinforcements’ and the like sound more appropriate to military enterprises than to Christian witness to God’s redeeming love in Jesus Christ. The statistical approach implied in the words ‘the unreached two-billions’ is derogatory to our neighbors of other faiths. Unreached by whom?”¹⁹

Dr. Samartha further expressed the view of the WCC that the Church faces a serious dilemma:

The Church must humbly acknowledge the dilemma it faces when proclaiming to the whole world the Gospel of Jesus Christ ‘to the end that all men may believe in Him and be saved’ . . . It rightly points to salvation, but cannot establish the need for and the credibility of the Saviour. It claims to have a universal message, but hesitates to shed its inhibiting particularity.²⁰

Religious Pluralism is being presented by the WCC as the acknowledgement of the equal value of all religions or belief systems and the admission that one belief system is not the exclusive source of truth in knowing Who God is and how He relates to mankind. However, religious pluralism is an incremental but significant step in moving the world toward an idolatrous world religious system that is primarily a rejection of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.²¹

¹⁷ See TRP, “Roman Catholicism – Part Two, Conditions For Salvation,” #4. pg. 10

¹⁸ <http://www.oikoumene.org>, “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry - Faith and Order Paper No. 111”

¹⁹ S. J. Samartha, “Partners in Community: Some Reflections on Hindu-Christian Relations Today» in: *Occasional Bulletin*, Vol. 4, No: 2, April 1980, p. 80.

²⁰ “The Quest for Salvation and the Dialogue between Religions” in: *International Review of Mission*, October 1968, p. 429

²¹ This idolatrous world religious system will become fully evident during the Tribulation period when the antichrist proclaims himself to be God and demands all the world worship him.

Dr. Samartha, the first director of the WCC sub-unit, said that “Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies,” raised serious questions regarding the Lordship of Jesus Christ.²²

Samartha argued that a new understanding of the Lordship of Christ was urgent. He said that the sensitive question of the place of Christ in the midst of plurality should be regarded both as “a theological responsibility and a pastoral concern.”²³ . . . He felt that the whole question of Christ’s Lordship needs re-examination. Even though the concept is central to the New Testament, it does not mean that it was faithfully developed in Western theology.²⁴

Samartha emphasized that the confession of the Lordship of Christ is primarily the result of the resurrection²⁵ and that in history “this conquest of death” has been turned into a command to “conquer other religions.”²⁶

As director of the WCC sub-unit, Samartha accused the Christian church of Christomonism²⁷ which “sometimes leads Christians to regard Jesus as a kind of cult figure over against other religious figures.”²⁸

The Church in history has tended to glorify, exalt and deify Jesus Christ . . . In doing so, Christians have sometimes succumbed to the dangers of ‘a personality cult’, where the underlying fact that ‘God is all in all’ has been almost lost sight of. The New Testament witness, in Samartha’s view, is not that Jesus rose from the dead, but that God raised him from the dead.²⁹

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Religious Pluralism is promoted through the idea that the Holy Spirit speaks to humanity through all traditions and faiths. The WCC insists that “God the Holy Spirit has been at work in the life and traditions of peoples of living faiths” and that it is through the Spirit “that we may be able to interpret the truth and goodness of other religions.” The WCC states that we need to “admire the things which God has accomplished and continues to accomplish in them through the Spirit.” The WCC further insists that we not only must respect the religious convictions of other belief systems, but actually allow the dialogue we have with those of other belief systems to “transform the way we do theology.” In other words, the WCC is seeking to move world religions “toward a

²² The views expressed by Dr. Samartha were shared by his successor S. Wesley Ariarajah who also served as deputy General Secretary of the WCC.

²³ “The Lordship of Christ and Religious Pluralism”, typed script, p.1.

²⁴ S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Some Glimpses into the Theology of Dr Stanley Samartha*, <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd38-03.html>

²⁵ Ibid. p. 5.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 7.

²⁷ Christomonism is the heresy of denying the trinity and identifying Christ as the singular representation of God.

²⁸ Ibid. p.11.

²⁹ “The Lordship of Christ and Religious Pluralism”, typed script, p.5.

dialogical theology”³⁰ or a study and an understanding of God that is arrived at through dialogue with those of other beliefs, rather than through a study and application of the Word of God.

The WCC recognizes three responses to religious pluralism. First, an *exclusivist* response which holds, “there is truth and salvation only in the way of Christ;” second, an *inclusivist* response that feels “Christ is present and at work even among those who may not know Christ, as such” but who “are included in God’s plan of salvation through the grace of Christ;” and third, a *pluralist* view “that God or what followers of some other religions call ‘reality’ can be known in many different ways.”

This later view is widely promoted by religious pluralism and according to the WCC, affirms “the activity of the Spirit” even beyond the boundaries of the church, and affirms “God’s saving activity in many places, within many traditions and in many ways.”³¹

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND DIALOGICAL THEOLOGY

Dialogical Theology is a compilation of all world views. For example, the WCC acknowledges that creation is a basic theme of the Bible from Genesis through the New Testament. The WCC also recognizes that an understanding of creation that is based on the record of the Word of God alone will never lead to pluralism. It is for this very reason that the WCC is seeking to move Christianity toward a dialogical theology. The WCC states, “Creation, however, is also a basic theme in many other religious traditions.” The WCC gives the following examples:

- Shinto thought: “The grains that grow, the myriad trees and grasses - all are blessings of the Great Kami of the Sun who lightens the Heaven.”³²
- Chinese writings: “There was something formless yet complete, that existed before heaven and earth; without sound, without substance, dependent on nothing, unchanging, all-pervading, unfailing. One may think of it as the mother of all things under heaven. Its true name we do not know; “Way” is the by-name that we give it.”³³
- Pacific Islands of Polynesia: “He existed, Ta’aroa was his name . . . Ta’aroa is . . . the rocks. Ta’aroa is the sands . . . Ta’aroa is the light; Ta’aroa is within; Ta’aroa is the germ. Ta’aroa is beneath; Ta’aroa is firm, Ta’aroa is wise.”
- Modern Zoroastrian: “Thou, dear Ahura Mazda, art the Master Planner, the Lord of all Creation; the Essence of Boundless Time and the very Spirit of Truth and Goodness. Thou art All-Wise and All-Knowing.”³⁴

After presenting these examples the WCC asks a question that appears to reveal one primary goal of religious pluralism to unite world religions to solve environmental problems.

³⁰ Ibid, all quotes in the paragraph from “The Holy Spirit and Religious Plurality”

³¹ <http://www.oikoumene.org>, Study 1: “Living in a Religiously Plural World”

³² Tsunetsugu Muraoka, *Studies in Shinto Thought*, Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, 1964, p. 157.

³³ *Tao Te Ching XXV*, from Arthur Waley, *The Way and its Power*, New York, Grove Press, 1958.

³⁴ “Learning from Other Faiths”, George Appleton, Third Lambeth Interfaith Lecture, 1981, p. 2.

What do the various accounts of creation, including our own, tell us of the natural world and humanity's relation to nature? Do these views help us to understand better and deal more effectively with the ecological crisis?

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND THE WORD OF GOD

Religious Pluralism considers the Bible to be a holy book among many holy books. The WCC which is the foremost promoter of religious pluralism acknowledges the Bible but adds, "Almost all of the major religious traditions of the world have scriptures, either written down or transmitted in oral tradition. These are seen as the sources of their faith and often as directly revealed by the Divine."³⁵ The suggestion made by the WCC is that those writings held sacred by other religions are just as authentic, reliable and authoritative as the Bible, and the attempt is then made by the WCC to move people toward a dialogical theology by encouraging the study and application of other religious traditions and beliefs.

The WCC gives this advice: "With the help and guidance of people of another faith in your community, select a few important passages from their scriptures and study them. Where possible, do this together with friends of other faiths, so that you may understand them in the light of authentic faith experience."³⁶ The WCC adds, "In dialogue with people of other faiths, we may discover perspectives and insights which could help us in developing our own interpretations of Christ and of God. They may see in Jesus something we have missed, or from the perspective of their own faith, they may raise questions that will throw light on the role of Christ in our faith."

By discounting the Bible as unique among books as the inspired revelation of God, those promoting religious pluralism have rejected the one true source of knowing God. Philosopher John Hick insists "there is no . . . agreement about how to determine the truth value of statements about God."³⁷

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND SALVATION IN JESUS CHRIST

Religious Pluralism rejects Jesus Christ as the only way to God. The WCC argues, "Because we have seen and experienced goodness, truth and holiness among followers of other paths and ways than that of Jesus Christ . . . we find ourselves recognizing a need to move beyond a theology which confines salvation to the explicit personal commitment to Jesus Christ."

The WCC does acknowledge the cross-work of Jesus Christ as "the saving mystery of God . . . which is "mediated and expressed in many and various ways as God's plan unfolds toward its fulfillment." However, the WCC then denies that salvation is only obtained by grace, through faith in Christ: "It may be available to those outside the fold of Christ in ways we cannot understand, as they live faithful and truthful lives in their concrete circumstances and in the framework of the religious traditions which guide and inspire them."³⁸

³⁵ <http://www.oikoumene.org>, Study 111: Scriptures

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, rev. ed. (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1977), 3.

³⁸ <http://www.oikoumene.org>, Baar Statement: Christology And Religious Plurality

The WCC suggests by means of questions that “Christ has to be reinterpreted in every cultural situation.”³⁹ In fact, the WCC offers quotes by those of other religions as verification that those of other faiths love Jesus, too.

- Hinduism: “From the perspective and background of my own Hindu tradition, I did not find it difficult to identify with the figure of Jesus. In fact, I found him positively attractive . . . Here, also, was a wandering spiritual teacher without home or possessions, fired by the true spirit of renunciation (*vairagya*). Here, also, was one who spoke with authority about the limitations and futility of the life which was spent solely in the selfish accumulation of wealth.”
- Islam: “One could of course make a comparison between Islam and Christianity by comparing the Prophet to Christ, the Qur’an to the New Testament, etc. . . . In this way the sacred book of one religion would correspond to the sacred book in the other religion, the central figure in one religion to the central figure in the other religion.”⁴⁰
- Buddhism: “Jesus Christ is God who became flesh by emptying himself, even unto death. Indeed, Jesus Christ may be said to be the Christian symbol of Ultimate Reality. So far, this Christian idea of the kenotic Christ is close to the idea of ‘neither man nor Buddha’. At least, it may be said that Christianity and Zen represent Ultimate Reality in similar terms, where the immanent and the transcendent, the secular and the sacred, are paradoxically one.”⁴¹

Salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is the message of the Gospel, and the antithesis is damnation and separation from a holy and righteous God. The WCC claims that both the meaning of salvation and the way of salvation can be interpreted or understood in many different ways and that “Other faith traditions also make claims to the uniqueness of their spiritual path, their relation to God, or their experience of redemption.”⁴² The WCC offers the views of other religions as to the meaning of salvation and the way of salvation:

- Hindu: I was an insignificant being worth nothing . . . I played on the sands of time, a puppet under the sway of the deceptive senses . . . till I grew weary and oppressed. It was then He endowed me with unquenchable yearning for “release” from the myriad perils of human existence, and enlightened me in the stupor of darkness. My God-Guru, peerless Gem of lustrous light, impregnated me with divine Love and cut asunder all earthly ties and made me “His own, His very own!” and led me to the Rock of Grace, from whence, I contacted directly the Sun of my Soul!⁴³
- Buddha: Soon after his enlightenment, the Buddha exclaimed: “Like a man lost in dense forest suddenly coming upon a track, a path, an ancient, forgotten path that led him to a

³⁹ <http://www.oikoumene.org>, Study IV: Jesus Christ

⁴⁰ S.H. Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, New York, F.A. Praeger, 1967, pp. 43-44.

⁴¹ Masao Abe, “God, Emptiness, and the True Self, in F. French, ed. *The Buddha Eye: an Anthology of the Kyoto School*, New York, Crossroad, 1982.

⁴² Study V: The Experience of Salvation

⁴³ From Ratna Navaratnam, *Tiruvachakam, the Hindu Testament of Love*, Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1963, pp. 63-64.

city long lost to view, so have I . . . It is the Way revealed by the Buddhas, long lost to man in the wilderness of his thoughts...”⁴⁴

- Muslim: “If my servant draws nearer to Me by a hands-breadth, I draw nearer to him by an arms-length, and if he draws nearer to Me by an arms-length, I draw nearer to him by twice that distance. And if he comes walking to meet Me, I come running to meet him.”⁴⁵

Religious pluralism insists God will consider all religious beliefs in granting salvation:

Though as Christians our testimony is always to the salvation we have experienced through Christ, we at the same time ‘cannot set limits to the saving power of God’ . . . This conviction that God as creator of all is present and active in the plurality of religions makes it inconceivable to us that God’s saving activity could be confined to any one continent, cultural type, or groups of peoples . . . a refusal to take seriously the many and diverse religious testimonies to be found among the nations and peoples of the whole world amounts to disowning the biblical testimony to God as creator of all things and father of humankind.”⁴⁶

Religious pluralism shares its roots with Liberation Theology, Collective Salvation and Universalism. Universalism is the belief that “eventually all human beings will be saved and will enjoy everlasting life with Christ.”⁴⁷ Collective Salvation is the belief that salvation is gained collectively by a group cooperating and sacrificing for the good of the whole.⁴⁸ Collective Salvation supports the philosophy of the ecumenical movement that Christians should be willing to work together with Catholicism, Islam, Buddhism, and Eastern mysticism religions, in order to work toward the eradication of poverty, crime, sickness, and environmental disaster.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND WORLD EVANGELIZATION

When speaking of witness and evangelism in a religiously plural world, the WCC suggests there is universality of the message people of all faiths bring to the world, and for that reason, Christians should honor the message of all religions.⁴⁹ The WCC offers the following observations by those of other religions, suggesting that these religions have a valid message that should be received with open-mindedness:

- Hindu: “Spirituality must conquer the West. Slowly, they are finding out that what they want is spirituality to preserve them as nations. They are waiting for it. They are eager for it. Where is the supply to come from? Where are the men ready to go out to every country in the world with the message of the great sages of India? Where are the men who are ready to sacrifice everything so that this message shall reach every corner of this

⁴⁴ Ven. M. Sumedha Thera, “An Analytical Aspect of the Buddha Dharma”, in *The Young Buddhist*, 1977, pp. 30-32.

⁴⁵ al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, Book 97, Section 50, Hadith

⁴⁶ <http://www.oikoumene.org>, Baar Statement: “*Christology And Religious Plurality*”

⁴⁷ Keith DeRose, *Universalism and the Bible*, <http://pantheon.yale.edu/~kd47/univ.htm>

⁴⁸ <https://www.gotquestions.org/collective-salvation.html>

⁴⁹ “One should not honour only one’s own religion and condemn the religion of others; but one should also honour others’ religions for this or that reason. In so doing, one helps one’s own religion to grow and renders service to the religions of others too.” Emperor Ashoka as quoted by the WCC in Study V: Witness in a Religiously Plural World

world? Such heroic souls are wanted to help the spread of truth; to disseminate the great truths of the Vedanta. The world wants it; without it, the world will be destroyed.”⁵⁰

- “Muslims are...charged with the noble mission of bringing the whole world to its Supreme Sovereign and of freeing it from servitude to any false god. The propagation of Islam to all people is a religious duty which must be undertaken by all true Muslims by following the good example of the Prophet who was sanctioned as ‘Mercy for all mankind.’”⁵¹
- Buddhism: “When Gautama Buddha admonished his disciples in the following words, Buddha Dhamma became an evangelistic religion: “Go ye forth, O Bhikkhus, on your journey, for the profit of the many, for the bliss of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the profit, the bliss of devas and mankind.”

Religious Pluralism cautions Christians against being dogmatic in witness and evangelism for three reasons. 1) Christians do not fully understand how God will complete His redemptive work in the world; 2) the peoples of the world already know God in their own way and have their own belief system which works for them; and 3) Christians should be open to the witness of others in a spirit of dialogical theology.

At its roots Religious Pluralism is opposed to evangelism and the preaching of the Gospel.

In May of 2006, a multifaith hearing on conversion, organized by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the WCC affirmed that “while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith . . . all should heal themselves from the obsession of converting others.” The process, “for which the WCC and the Vatican are jointly responsible, began formally in 2006 and is to end in 2009.” The objective of the process is to “discuss approaches and limitations on the conflictual issue of conversion . . . in a religiously plural world.”⁵²

Specifically, the process brought together Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal and Evangelical theologians with the “aim to articulate what a common code of conduct on religious conversion should look like from a Christian viewpoint.”⁵³

Rev. Dr Hans Ucko, WCC’s executive for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation states:

Conversion is a controversial issue . . . in Latin America, it is a source of tension between the Roman Catholic Church and the Pentecostal movement, while in other regions Orthodox churches often feel ‘targeted’ by some Protestant missionary groups . . . since there are many accusations of ‘sheep stealing’ among Christians we will most likely also focus on this issue.”⁵⁴

⁵⁰ *The Complete Works of Vivebananda*, Almora, Advaita Ashrama, 1924-32, III, p. 276.

⁵¹ Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *Islam and Christianity: a Muslim and a Christian in Dialogue*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1981, p. 76.

⁵² <http://www.oikoumene.org>, “Towards a code of conduct on conversion”

⁵³ <http://www.oikoumene.org>, “Progress towards a Christian code of conduct on religious conversion”

⁵⁴ Ibid

The WCC states that “the concept of spirituality varies between religions . . . and is understood in many ways within various religious traditions.”⁵⁵ Based on this, the WCC encourages Christians to learn from the evident spirituality of peoples of many faiths by “visiting a place of worship, a monastery, a meditation hall of another religious tradition”⁵⁶ and reflect on the songs, prayers and rituals.

CONCLUSION

Religious Pluralism is a satanic deception intended to blind the minds of those who do not believe⁵⁷ by denying the truth of God’s Word that clearly presents Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation from sin and eternal separation from God.

- Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).
- Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
- For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11).
- For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5).
- God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:11-12).

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

BOOKS:

- Harold A Netland, *Dissonant Voices - Religious pluralism and the question of truth*, (Grand rapids, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans 1991)
- D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (GR: Zondervan, 1996).

ARTICLES:

- Douglas E. Potter, *Christian Apologetics Journal*, *The Religious Pluralism of John Hick: A Critical Response to His Philosophical Argument*

⁵⁵ Study VII: Spirituality

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:4