

“Aren’t All Religions the Same?”

The National Presbyterian Church

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SCRIPTURES

Exclusive

Exodus 32, 1 Kings 18, 2 Kings 17:15, etc. [God’s anger with false gods/idols; the OT as a story of the clash of cultures and gods]

Micah 4:1-5 [All nations flowing to one place: Jerusalem and its Temple]

John 14:6 “No one comes to the Father but by me.” (to Jesus, the new ‘Temple’)

Acts 4:12 (Peter) “There is salvation in no other name”

John 3.18 (Jesus) “Those who believe in me are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

Not so Exclusive

Isaiah 44.21-45.1 A Persian king: “*Cyrus my servant, my messiah*”

Habbakuk 1 God uses the pagan Babylonians as his servants

Micah 4:1-5/Isaiah 2 God’s passion for “All nations”

Daniel/Joseph/Esther – working with pagan kings (Jeremiah 29:7)

Luke 3.8 (John the Baptist said) “*Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children of Abraham.*”

Not Everyone Who Looks Like A Christian Is A Christian

Matthew 7.21-23 (Jesus) *Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven*

Worship Practices Among God’s People Vary Enormously Over Time

(Is the Church Now the Same as the Church ‘Back Then’?)

Leviticus 1:1-9 The sacrificial system of the tabernacle and temple

1 Corinthians 14-15 Speaking in tongues; being baptized on behalf of the dead

Note 1: Historically, the organ was banned from Presbyterian churches until the 1800’s!! People stood to pray. No liturgical responses or celebrating Christmas.

Note 2: Would you be more comfortable in a Pentecostal Christian church or in a quiet sabbath service at the synagogue?

SO: Could Some Who Do Not Look Like Christians to us, be ‘Friends Of Jesus’?

Luke 7:1-11 (Jesus to a Roman soldier) “*I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith*”

Luke 10:25-37 “*And who is my neighbor?*” (story of the Good Samaritan)

John 10:16 (Jesus) “*I have other sheep who are not of this fold*”

Mark 9.38-41 (Jesus) “*Whoever is not against us is for us . . . whoever gives you a cup of cold water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose their reward*”

Acts 17 [Paul in Athens] (23) “*What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you*”. . . ; (30) “*God has overlooked the times of human ignorance.*”

Beware of judging or being too earnest prematurely

Matthew 13:24-30 Jesus’ story of the wheat and the weeds (‘tares’)

Being Vigilant for Ourselves

Matthew 7:24-29 Build your House upon the Rock!

John 21:21-22 Peter said to Jesus, “*Lord what about him?*” Jesus said to him, “*if it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!*”

FURTHER READING

All Different (no religion better than the others)

Stephen Prothero, God is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions that Run the World, 2010.

All the Same “Ultimately”

Houston Smith The World’s Religions (widely read college text book)

Karen King, John Hicks (many books!)

Christ the Center

Tim Keller, The Reason for God, 2008, pp. 3-21

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, 1946, pp. 29-51

Terry Muck, Aliens on American Turf, 1990. (any books by him)

Frances S. Adeney and Terry Muck, Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-first Century, 2009.

Interview with Muck and Adeney

<http://johnwmorehead.blogspot.com/2009/03/muck-and-adeney-christianity.html>

Leslie Newbiggin, Foolishness to the Greeks, 1986.

Keith Ward, Is Religion Dangerous? 2006 (Oxford Univ. professor, retd.)

CONFESSIONS (PCUSA Constitution)

Nicene Creed (4th century)

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.*

Second Helvetic Confession (1561)

Chapter 17 - Of the Catholic and Holy Church of God

For we know that God had some friends in the world outside the commonwealth of Israel We know what happened to St. Peter, who denied his Master, and what is wont to happen daily to God's elect and faithful people who go astray and are weak. We know, moreover, what kind of churches the churches in Galatia and Corinth were in the apostles' time, in which the apostle found fault with many serious offenses; yet he calls them holy churches of Christ (I Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2).

. . . the Church of God is rightly compared to a net which catches fish of all kinds, and to a field, in which both wheat and tares are found (Matt. 13:24 ff., 47 ff.).

We Must Not Judge Rashly of Prematurely. Hence we must be very careful not to judge before the time, nor undertake to exclude, reject or cut off those whom the Lord does not want to have excluded or rejected, and those whom we cannot eliminate without loss to the Church. On the other hand, we must be vigilant lest while the pious snore the wicked gain ground and do harm to the Church.

Westminster Confession Of Faith 1647

Chapter 8 Of Christ the Mediator

VI. The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.

VI. Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after his incarnation, *yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated into the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world*, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed of the woman, which should bruise the serpent's head, and the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world, being yesterday and today the same and for ever.

Confession of 1967 -- Chapter 3. Revelation and Religion

The church in its mission encounters the religions of people and in that encounter becomes conscious of its own human character as a religion.

- God's revelation to Israel, expressed within Semitic culture, gave rise to the religion of the Hebrew people.
- God's revelation in Jesus Christ called forth the response of Jews and Greeks and came to expression within Judaism and Hellenism as the Christian religion.

The Christian religion, as distinct from God's revelation of himself, has been shaped throughout its history by the cultural forms of its environment.

- The Christian finds parallels between other religions and his own and must approach all religions with openness and respect.
- Repeatedly God has used the insight of non-Christians to challenge the church to renewal.

But the reconciling word of the gospel is God's judgment upon all forms of religion, including the Christian. The gift of God in Christ is for all people.

The church, therefore, is commissioned to carry the gospel to *all people whatever their religion may be, and even when they profess none.*

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COMPARISONS

The Color Method: (see M.T. Thanaraj, Relating to People of Other Religions)

1. Black & White = We're all right and they are all wrong
2. Shades of Grey = We're all the same (a mixture of truth and error)
3. Shades of White and Grey = We're all different (maybe one is more true than another, but still, in an imperfect world, all religions are a mixture of truth and error)
4. Color Blind = We don't know enough to know who's right or wrong.
5. White & White = What we have is good for us, what they have is good for them

The Content Method (Purpose/Problem to be resolved)

What do religions say about

1. Human Nature?
2. How to Live?
3. The Character of God
4. What God has done in history?