

# Religious Pluralism - Zoom Class with African Preachers (via Barry Smith)

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Example: Parable of 4 Blind Men & Elephant: Rope, Snake, Tree, Wall. Supposed to teach that all can be true, depending on perspective. Actually, teaches that all can be *false*, because none of the 4 were true: it's an elephant!

If teaches anything, it's the danger of *partial truth*.

Definition of Religious Pluralism - culture not dominated by any one belief system, but many exist side-by-side. In U.S., used to be multiple "Christian" denominations. Now much more varied.

Example: Across the street - Mormon Temple, Hindu Temple, nearby Mosque & Buddhist Temple.

No different from NT times: many pagan religions, Judaism, mystery religions, mythologies, etc. Example: Acts 17 - "full of idols." but also a synagogue.

Another Version of Religious Pluralism = Syncretism. Blending elements of 2 or more. EX: "Zen Christianity," "Jewish Buddhism."

What are different religions you encounter where you are?

Many (not all) view Religious Pluralism as a good thing, saying 1 religion is as valid as another. *But are all religions equally valid?* This is the Real Question.

What does "valid" mean? *3 Criteria:*

- \*Based on truth/reality.

- \*Lead us to God & relationship with Him

- \*Has eternal value; not valid just for now, something to believe. But, will this take us into eternity? Save us from destruction?

Based on these criteria, answer has to be "NO!, all religions are not equal"

They can't be, if such a thing as Truth exists. John 18:37-38. "What is truth?" Many are skeptical that it exists in the absolute sense. (Saying nothing is absolutely right or wrong, or true or false.)

REASONS all religions are not equally valid:

1. Both OT & NT Examples say, "No!" - Example: Idolatry in Israel, condemned by God. Acts 17 - Paul in Athens – the statue "to an unknown god."

2. Some claim that all are equally valid, actually saying all are equally *invalid*, so none are actually true. Why? Because beliefs are opposite and they cancel each other out.

Example: Panel with Imam & Rabbi. Question is asked: Can we share "fellowship." No, because what Islam & Judaism teach deny very heart of Christian faith.

Example: Would a Muslim be honored if you said his religion is equally as valid as Hinduism (the belief in 1 true God vs. millions)? No, he would not be honored, or agree with

you.

Contradictory truth claims simply can't be reconciled! So all religions can't be equal.

3. Some criticize Christianity for making claim to exclusive truth. But ALL religions claim exclusive truth. Example: Buddhism: there is no personal god at all. Hinduism, there are millions of gods! Islam claims only Allah is god..

Even *atheists* have exclusive truth claims: They think their view equals only right one! Everyone else is wrong if they believe in any Deity at all.

4. Are all religious *practices* equally valid? Is an "honor killing" or *suttee* on same level as "taking care of widows & orphans"? (Jas 1:27)

5. "What's different about Christianity?"

\*Not that Christians are perfect & others aren't either.

Christians often fail to live up to the highest standards set by Jesus & elsewhere in Scrip. Example: "Love your enemies."

\*So what makes Christianity "more valid" than other religious beliefs?

\*Answer: Jesus! (Example: "Similarities between Buddhism & Christianity" - prayer, etc.). Yes, but 1 great difference: Jesus!)

\*Of all religions in world, only Christianity has a Savior. Only one realistic solution to Sin. - Example: Muslims & Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) must save themselves by their works; Muhammad a prophet who left an instruction manual for "do it yourself." Hindus hope for a higher reincarnation thru accumulation of *karma*, but may not get it; their best hope is for extinction, not salvation. Buddhists believe people are "dissolved into the universe" like smoke dissipated into the air. No hope!

\*Judaism = a messianic relationship without a Messiah.

\*Only Jesus makes eternal life possible, & offers it freely to all. Impossible to do it on our own; reason we need grace!

\*Only Christianity offers completely realistic portrayal of the human condition: sinners in need of a Savior. Grace, not merit.

\*Only Christianity offers unity with the God who made us, & wants us to live with Him forever.

\*Jesus' death atones for sin; Resurrection gives hope of conquering death.

\*The question of "validity" is not about US - it's about Jesus!

So what should be our Attitude toward those of other religions?

\*Not superiority, because we are only sinners saved by grace.

\*Rather, to love them, pray for them, even when they abuse us. What Jesus taught in the sermon on the mount.

\*Maybe their religion gives some insight about God & respect toward Jesus. Build on that & bring them the rest of the way to God. (What Paul did in Acts 17/Athens.)

\*We cannot assume they are "okay" simply because they are "religious."

\*1 Pet 3:14-17 - not *assimilation* or *isolation*, but *engagement*, always prepared to explain our faith to them in hopes they will believe also.