

Theological Equipping Class

Intro to World Religions

May 3, 2020

Introduction

1. Why should we study world religions?
2. What is religion?
3. Who is religious?
4. How many religions are there?
5. What makes Christianity distinct amongst all the other religions?

Why should we study world religions?

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for " 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, " 'For we are indeed his offspring.' Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." (Acts 17:22-31)

- What does Paul notice?

- How?

- Why?

What does this teach us about the value in learning about world religions?

What is religion?

One-size fits all?

- religion is about the worship of a particular god?
- a way of relating to the supernatural?
- belief in life after death?
- belief in morality?
- I can't define it, but I know it when I see it?
- All religions are the same?

Definitions:

a system of beliefs and practices that provides values to give life meaning and coherence by directing a person toward transcendence (Winfried Corduan)

a set of beliefs that explain what life is all about, who we are, and how we should spend our time

Religion is a social-cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations, that relates humanity to supernatural, transcendental, or spiritual elements. However, there is no scholarly consensus over what precisely constitutes a religion. (Wikipedia)

Questions:

- Why are we here?
- Who or what made everything?
- Are people different from animals?
- What happens to us when we die?
- What is right and wrong?
- How do we know right from wrong?

- Is there any cure for what is wrong?

Who is religious?

Everyone is religious:

The law is written on our hearts

We all have a worldview

We were created to worship

We each serve a king

"Everyone is religious. Every religion points to something that is ultimate. Your religion points to what really most matters to you. Even if you just live for yourself and you say the only thing that matters to me is that I'm free to choose what I want to do with my life, then your freedom now is the ultimate thing. Your freedom is like your god. It's what you put your faith in and your hope in as well as your own competence to make decisions about how to live life. So if you're living for your own freedom, or if you're living for your family, or you're living for your nation or you're living for God, or you're living for a certain kind of god, that affects the way in which you live. Everybody has to serve something as their ultimate hope and meaning in life. Therefore everyone is religious." (Tim Keller)

Is everyone really religious? What about secular humanists/atheists?

Distinct attributes of a religion:

- Collection of sacred writings...scriptures
- Sacred teachers or gurus
- Certain traditions
- Certain commandments
- Understanding of evil or sin
- Certain view of salvation or redemption from that evil

Religion in McKinney

How many religions are there?

Religion in the US military

Exhaustive list of all religions?

How many could you name?

4 categories of religions:

1. Religions that say that everything is god – pantheism
2. Religions that say that there are many gods – polytheism
3. Religions that say that there is one god – monotheism
4. Religions that say that there is no god. - atheism

Pantheism examples

Polytheism examples

What is henotheism?

Monotheism examples

Atheism examples

Two categories: Christianity and everything else

- Two kings and only two kingdoms

What makes Christianity distinct?

"Christianity isn't a religion, it's a relationship. Religion is man's attempt to reach God. Christianity is God's attempt to reach man. Therefore, Christianity is not a religion."

What's the problem?

1. Logical fallacy
2. The use of the word religion in the Bible
3. Church history

Bonus: freedom of religion

What is it that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions?

1. Objective and verifiable historical facts
2. Trinitarianism
3. Jesus

4. Justification by faith alone

Fundamental questions to keep in mind as we study world religions over the next 2 months:

1. What does this religion believe about God?
2. What does this religion believe about man?
3. What does this religion believe is wrong with the world?
4. What does this religion believe has been done, will be done, or should be done to make it right?
5. What does this religion believe is the source of authority for knowing such things?

Back to Athens

Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, "We will hear you again about this." So Paul went out from their midst. But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them. (Acts 17:32–34)

Three responses to the proclamation of the gospel:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.