

# Elixer of the gods (joseph campbell)

Religion



Gentlemen, What Campbell is suggesting in this passage is that the god or gods of various religious traditions can be reduced to a single quality of divinity. He uses two strategies to accomplish this. In the first instance, he identifies various divinities from world religions by mentioning single items (such as the thunderbolt) that they have in common, while ignoring anything that makes them separate, especially any facts from the fields of history or historical linguistics. But he outdoes himself in propounding this rather common syncretic practice. He identifies specific discrete qualities of various unrelated deities even where the qualities themselves have nothing in common, thereby making Zeus' wielding of the thunderbolt to punish perjurers or defeat Titans and monsters with the doctrine of transubstantiation. This kind of identification is no small miracle in and of itself, and Campbell performs it by identifying each discrete category with another entity, the "elixir of Imperishable Being," which, in the form he postulates here, does not exist in any religious tradition and appears to be the product of his own imagination. The other strategy he uses is to suspend key points of his argument on undefined technical terms such as "energy-substance" which do not have commonly agreed meanings and in this case appears to mean nothing since the compound is self-contradictory. Because of this the argument cannot be understood and therefore is not subject to formal criticism or falsification. Therefore, gentlemen, I do not see how you can possibly respond on the basis of your own faith traditions, since the whole point of the passage is to dissolve the boundaries that define faith traditions and create an understanding of religion from whatever floats to the top in the resulting flood of poorly defined or understood ideas. But you can no doubt respond better than I how your traditions view the ideas

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implicit in Campbell's reasoning such as pantheism and syncretism, and the few specific doctrines he tolerates, such as the denial that Yahweh or Allah can be considered "The Ultimate in its primary state," or the idea that grace offered by Jesus is released not to all but only to the "duly proven."