

Religious pluralism essay example

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



The 20th century, in contradiction to the Secularization Thesis that was exceedingly popular in the end of the 19th-first half of the 20th century, was not marked by total disappearance of religion as a power significantly influencing human life. All the other way, not only traditional world religions like Christianity and Islam continue to play an important role in human society, but scores of new religions and cults, or new religious movements as they are usually called now, keep on appearing, finding their followers, merging, dividing and borrowing elements one from another and so on. In such an atmosphere it is much easier to deal with individual religions if you understand basic principles according to which they can be defined, compared and classified in correlation with each other.

For example, I found the concept of Orthodoxy/Orthopraxis dichotomy quite an interesting one, although I wouldn't go as far as saying that every religion is primarily based on either of these principles. I think that this concept serves better as a way to understand the structure of religion and not as a means of subdividing religions into types. After all, every religion presupposes the existence of correct thinking (i. e., orthodoxy) and correct activity or behavior (i. e., orthopraxis). We all, of course, know the famous saying of St. Augustine: " Love God and do as you please"; but this phrase does not mean that the sheer presence of belief justifies any kind of behavior; it means that a person who is correct in his belief and thinking is simply incapable of doing anything wrong. In my opinion, every religion is based on combination of these two principles; for practice without belief is but an ethical system and belief without practice is just a bunch of myths. Another interesting aspect of religious practices I learnt (or, more exactly,

not learnt, but simply paid attention to for the first time) is the idea of new religious movements as opposed to the terms that, according to the text are kind of outdated: sects and cults. I, however, am not so sure whether this more neutral term should be used to define any religious organization without exception. No one can reasonably dispute the idea that religious tolerance is a great thing, but should the society be tolerant to something for the sake of tolerance itself? Don't we need a term to define a religious trend that practices something that is frowned upon by the majority of people? Shouldn't there be an accepted term for a movement that is potentially dangerous for its members, or other individuals, or both? Or, more exactly, where does tolerance ends and connivance begins? Of course, not every new religion practices (or can be suspected in practicing) something immoral, but is it right to place, for example, the peaceful Amish in one category with undeniably violent and dangerous Aum Shinrikyo? Shouldn't the society have an opportunity to express its suspicion if the organization isolates its members from their relatives, demands them to donate their property or encourages its followers to commit mass suicides? If we use the term "new religious movement" indiscriminately we achieve not what we are supposed to achieve – equally tolerant attitude – but something completely different. Instead of removing a derogatory label from a number of religions, we create a new morally ambiguous term that means nothing.

Interreligious dialogue is another interesting issue approached in the unit, although I somewhat doubt that movements like Theosophy or Baha'i should be perceived as an attempt of actually bringing together different religions, because even if it is so, it is a very unsuccessful attempt – for the simple

reason that such movements generally attract people who are for dissatisfied with the religions their families and environment traditionally belong, and not those who actually play any significant roles in these religions. As a result, the endeavors of this kind lead not to the creation of a universal religion that would satisfy everyone, but to the emergence of a new religious movement that is equally disliked by all the representatives of the religions they borrowed elements from. Such results can hardly be called an example of interreligious dialogue.

All in all, the unit has been informative and thought-provoking, and I've learned a number of fascinating facts, especially about modern religious movements, some of which I have never heard about. It also helps you to perceive religious dynamism and think about religion as a dynamic entity which moves and changes along with the times. It does not mean that every period of time requires its own religion; it means that religion is an inherent part of human culture and cannot be substituted by anything. The failure of the secularization thesis shows us that religion and reason are not, in fact, two contradictory notions; as one theologian has once said, "the man needs both faith and science to live just like the bird needs both its wings to fly". Reason and faith go hand in hand and, if perceived correctly, can co-work to make human's life better.