

# Example of religious pluralism critical thinking

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



The concept of religious pluralism is deceptively simple; it expresses the acceptance of many different religions. However, religious pluralism happens on a spectrum - there are varying degrees by which individuals, clergy, scholars and anyone accepts the validity of other religions. Religious pluralism can be defined as considering the concept that a person's religion does not provide the exclusive truth of the universe, and that other religions are perfectly valid in terms of moral values and certain truths. This has become a very prevalent part of the twenty-first century's stance on religion: " During the last decade or so Western philosophers of religion have increasingly felt obliged to take note of the fact that Christianity is only one of the great world faiths and that monotheism is only one of the major types of religion" (Hick, p. 607).

Others may fully believe in the truth of two or more religions; these people fully embrace the mutually exclusive ideas of each religion and consider them valid. Regardless of where one falls in the spectrum, there are many fundamental questions that are asked of religious pluralists - the most important of these being: How does one cope with religious pluralism given the inherent fallacy that no two religions can both be correct? With this in mind, the following paper argues for the resolution of conflicting truth-claims in religious pluralism with the concept of an all-encompassing cognition of God which envelops all types of religious experience into what is, essentially, the same deity and belief system.

Conflicting truth-claims are a substantial problem in the topic of religious pluralism. For example, the God of Christianity and Buddha hold substantially different statuses in their respective religions - God is an omniscient

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caretaker and creator of the world, whereas Buddha was a human being and spiritual teacher who merely came up with the tenets of Buddhism. Concepts of the afterlife vary from religion to religion, and each one claims that theirs is the only one that is true, not others. Other concepts of experiences that can be construed as religious include "mystical experiences of direct awareness of, and even union with, God," as well as general feelings of God in one's life, personal events and the contemplation of life and death on the whole (Hick, p. 608). If these types of experiences are found in many other religions, does that mean theirs should also be respected and acknowledged?

Many people frame their religious beliefs through their own history and experiences. "With the widespread consensus that the traditional theistic arguments fail to prove, and that the idea of probability has no useful purchase here a different approach to the rationality or otherwise of theistic belief has emerged" (p. 607). Subjective experiences where people personally "feel God" often lead to a more concrete belief in that particular God than they would hearing others' claims of the same experience. Rational belief stems from what one viscerally experiences, and therefore one's own interpretation of the divine is bolstered by what they feel. This has the effect of making one dubious of other truth-claims that come from others who also claim visceral experiences of their own version of the divine. With these fundamental incompatibilities in place, reaching a state of religious pluralism when it comes to one's faith can be quite difficult to achieve.

People's comfort level with religious pluralism deals heavily with their willingness to accept conflicting truth-claims; this is evidenced through the interpretation of their own religion. The most rigid interpretations cite religion as " a self-regulating response of the human animal to the pressures generated by its particular niche within the biological system" and an embrace of the ambiguity of the universe (Hick, p. 1). One of the biggest difficulties with reconciling religious pluralism for some is the terminology of each religion; many different religions have similar or differing concepts, all given different labels and sometimes analogous to one another. As " we have very little in the way of a tradition-neutral religious vocabulary," these words can often be poorly used to apply to the same traditions in other religions (Hicks, p. 9). With this phenomenon, a divide occurs that makes it difficult for some to relate to the traditions of others, making religious pluralism a complex status to achieve in most.

Terminology and the reconciliation thereof is one significant stepping stone toward achieving religious pluralism. For example, there are many different ways for religions to quantify or label a savior or a spiritual transition from bad situations into good ones. Christianity uses the aforementioned 'savior' while 'Buddhist salvation' or Zen enlightenment can also bring about the same result (Hick, p. 10). If the labels separate religions give to the transcendent can be removed or appropriately addressed, their separate meanings can also be stripped away and can be viewed as a unified experience.

The major question that must be asked of religious pluralism and the quest to attain it is whether or not it is wanted in the first place. Why do people seek out religious pluralism as a theology or philosophy? For those who have achieved it, how might they interpret their own contradictions and accept or embrace the equally ardent beliefs of others who believe in a different God? This dilemma can be properly expressed through Alston's perspective that "because it is rational to base beliefs on religious experience, Christian religious experience entitles those who participate in it to hold distinctively Christian beliefs" (Hick. p. 609). Likewise, Muslims who experience the divine entitle their own beliefs, as to Jews, Buddhists and beyond.

One way in which religious pluralism can be achieved is through an understanding of the comparative philosophy of religion. Despite many fundamental differences between faiths, there are many constants that certainly form the basis for an acceptance of multiple religions. According to Griffiths, religion is, in its ideal form, a method of connection between the conscious world and the spiritual - between man and God, either in manifest form or within what is construed as a 'soul' (p. 617). The genus of religion itself extends to most, if not all, major religions - Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc. Furthermore, beyond defining religion, comparative philosophy of religion also relates the common phenomenon that are found in most religions to each other. Many different aspects of religious belief are found among all of the major religions of the world - religious doctrine (the rules about morality and behavior, as well as belief, that serve as the instructional compass for a religious follower) is typically found in all of these religions. Also, the honoring of Gods and the follower's faith through ritual is

a common occurrence, as well as exegesis (how religious communities apply religious doctrine to their daily lives) (Griffiths, p. 618).

Given these similarities, it can become quite easy to reconcile the notions and validity of other religions that stand apart from one's own. With religious pluralism, a follower recognizes the similarity in these religions and accepts others' beliefs as equally valid. However, this still does not fully address conflicting truth-claims among religions - despite similarities in behavior and doctrine, it is never explicitly stated that they are the same.

With all of this in mind, how does religious pluralism reconcile itself with conflicting truth-claims? This is done through the gradual acceptance of the validity of different religions, and/or the widening of perspective from the perception of one religion's God into a more universal spirituality, in which one true belief system is simply called many different things by different cultures. Smart and Ward have determined that many of the world's religions are complementary in nature, and that enables the Reality of God to be expressed throughout each of them in identifiable ways. The overall ideal proposed in this pluralistic unity is to create a convergent spirituality through friendly interactions with others who do not share the same fundamental religious beliefs. The result of this interaction is a better understanding between peoples, and a reconciliation of truth-claims. The biggest problem with this theory is that these claims still conflict; this theory simply makes it so that conflict is not a big of an issue.

Given the seemingly inexorable problem of conflicting truth-claims between religions, achieving religious pluralism is a difficult thing to do. Significant

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changes in perception and a lessening of the sense of competition or righteousness perceived by many ardent religious followers would have to occur in order for these people to accept and intellectually resolve anxieties about conflicting religions.

The differences and analogies in terminology also play a factor in these philosophical dichotomies, as well as an understanding of many religions' comparative philosophy. With that in mind, it can be argued that religious pluralism can come about when spiritual followers accept a more open-ended spirituality that reconciles the concepts of their God with the God of others.

## **Works Cited**

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