



into the Melting Pot

the question is more important than the answer

Sunday 16 February 2014

Ways to God – Christianity and other world religions

The Eight World Religions With Most Adherents (though not necessarily practicing)

Christianity	2100m
Islam	1300m
Hindu	860m
Chinese Traditional	400m
Buddhism	380m
Primal - Indigenous	300m
Sikhism	25m
Judaism	15m

The Christianity category can be broken down . . .

Roman Catholic	1100m
Protestant	370m
Orthodox	220m
Anglican	82m
Others	333m

(Data pulled together from various educational internet sites, which are in general agreement)

PS: The seventh most popular faith in the last UK census, with 176632 responses was 'Jedi Knight'.

Three Views of Religion

- 1 Absolute – one's own religion is the absolute and only truth; all major faiths have elements within them that emphasise this aspect of their faith.
- 2 Reduction – all religion is a human invention, with the extreme view being that it is a load of 'rubbish'.
- 3 Sacramental – religion is a way of mediating the sacred (the 'more', the 'real', . . .)
 - Yes, a human creation, but in response to experiences of the 'more'
 - A cultural linguistic tradition (like being French)
 - A wisdom tradition, seeking to explain the 'real' and the 'way' to it
 - An aesthetic tradition – valuing beauty (art, music, . . .)
 - A community of practice, seeking 'thin places'
 - A community of transformation – becoming new people

All major religions

- Are an affirmation of the 'real'
- Show a 'way' - a path, how to live
- Provide practical means for living the 'way'
- Include compassion (but you don't need religion to be compassionate)
- Have beliefs and teachings

Absolutism within Christianity

Acts 4:12 – words attributed by Luke to Peter, talking about Jesus: “Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us”.

John 14:6 – words attributed by the author of John’s Gospel to Jesus: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me”. (Good News Bible)

These words can be seen as hyperbole, giving confirmation and self-worth to those early followers of Jesus who were trying to establish their identity in a hostile environment.

Roman Catholic creed: “Outside the church there is no salvation”.

Similarly, when under attack, the barriers go up!

However

Grace - If our relationship with God (with ‘reality’, ‘being’, the ‘more’ . . .) is based on grace, then it is not based on requirement!

So Why Be A Christian?

A paraphrase of a reply from the Dali Lama to a Christian lady who asked whether she should become a Buddhist: If you search for water, it is better to dig a well 60 feet deep than six wells each 10 feet deep.

Stay within your cultural, linguistic, wisdom community: seek those ‘thin’ places between the ‘now’ and the ‘more’; get ‘deeper’ into your own tradition and become more transformed.

A challenge for us all is to celebrate our differences rather than to seek out and only value our similarities.

What About Mission?

Surely we are misguided to think that we must bring ‘our’ beliefs to the ‘heathen’; rather we should celebrate our diversity of spirituality, and seek to learn from other’s experiences. Mission is not about conversion, but compassion!

References

Marcus Borg – The Heart Of Christianity: Rediscovering A Life Of Faith (HarperOne)

John Selby Spong – A new Christianity For A New World: Why Traditional Faith Is Dying & How A New Faith Is being Born (HarperOne)