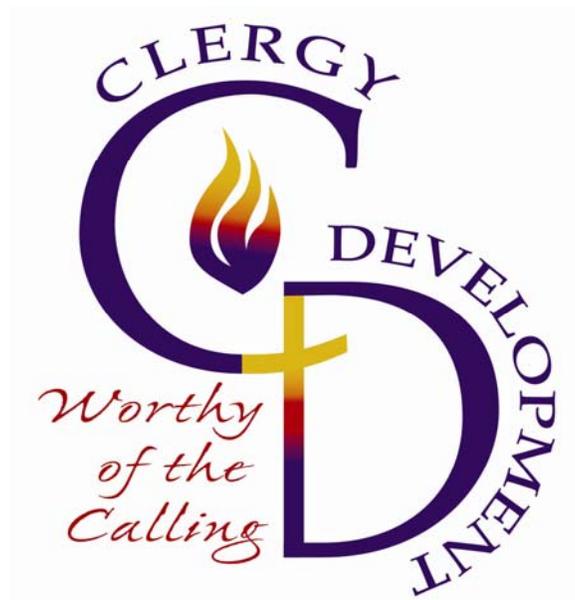


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Faculty Guide

# Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World



Clergy Development  
Church of the Nazarene  
Kansas City, Missouri  
816-333-7000 ext. 2468; 800-306-7651 (USA)  
2005

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The **Modular Course of Study** is an outcome-based curriculum designed to implement the educational paradigm defined by the Breckenridge Consultations. Clergy Development is responsible for maintaining and distributing the Modular Course of Study for the Church of the Nazarene.

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**Journaling Essay** written by Rick Ryding

**Principal contributors** for each module are listed in specific Faculty Guides.

## Series Foreword

### **A Vision for Christian Ministry: Clergy Education in the Church of the Nazarene**

The chief purpose of all persons—indeed, all of the creation—is to worship, love, and serve God. God has made himself known in His deeds of creation and redemption. As the Redeemer, God has called into existence a people: the Church, who embody, celebrate, and declare His name and His ways. The life of God with His people and the world constitutes the Story of God. That story is recorded principally in the Old and New Testaments, and continues to be told by the resurrected Christ who lives and reigns as Head of His Church. The Church lives to declare the whole Story of God. This it does in many ways—in the lives of its members who are even now being transformed by Christ through preaching, the sacraments, in oral testimony, community life, and in mission. All members of the Body of Christ are called to exercise a ministry of witness and service. No one is excluded.

In God's own wisdom He calls some persons to fulfill the ministry of proclaiming the gospel and caring for God's people, in a form referred to as the ordained ministry. God is the initial actor in this call, not humans. In the Church of the Nazarene we believe God calls and persons respond. They do not elect the Christian ministry. All persons whom God calls to the ordained ministry should continue to be amazed that He would call them. They should continue to be humbled by God's call. The *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene states, "we recognize and hold that the Head of the Church calls some men and women to the more official and public work of the ministry." It adds, "The church, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, will recognize the Lord's call" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 400).

An ordained Christian minister has as his or her chief responsibility to declare in many ways the whole Story of God as fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. His or her charge is to "tend the flock of God . . . not under compulsion, but willingly, not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:2-3, NRSV). The minister fulfills this charge under the supervision of Christ, the chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4). Such ministry can be fulfilled only after a period of careful

preparation. Indeed, given the ever-changing demands placed upon the minister, “preparation” never ceases.

A person who enters the Christian ministry becomes in a distinct sense a steward of the gospel of God (Titus 1: 7). A steward is one who is entrusted to care for what belongs to another. A steward may be one who takes care of another person or who manages the property of someone else. All Christians are stewards of the grace of God. But in addition, in a peculiar sense a Christian minister is a steward of the “mystery of God,” which is Christ, the Redeemer, the Messiah of God. In all faithfulness, the minister is called to “make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel” (Eph 6: 19, NRSV). Like Paul, he or she must faithfully preach “the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph 3: 8-10, NRSV).

In fulfilling this commission, there is plenty of room for diligence and alertness, but no room for laziness or privilege (Titus 1: 5-9). Good stewards recognize that they are stewards only, not the owners, and that they will give an account of their stewardship to the master. Faithfulness to one’s charge and to the Lord who issued it is the steward’s principal passion. When properly understood, the Christian ministry should never be thought of as a “job.” It is ministry—uniquely Christian ministry. No higher responsibility or joy can be known than to become a steward of the Story of God in Christ’s Church. The person who embraces God’s call to the ordained ministry will stand in the company of the apostles, the Early Fathers of the Church, the Reformers of the Middle Ages, the Protestant Reformers, and many persons around the world today who joyfully serve as stewards of the gospel of God.

Obviously, one who does not recognize, or who understands but rejects, just how complete and inclusive a minister’s stewardship must be, should not start down the path that leads to ordination. In a peculiar sense, a Christian minister must in all respects model the gospel of God. He or she is to “shun” the love of money. Instead, the minister must “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.” He or she must “fight the good fight of the faith” and “take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called” (1 Tim 6: 11-12, NRSV).

Hence, the Church of the Nazarene believes “the minister of Christ is to be in all things a pattern to the flock—in punctuality, discretion, diligence, earnestness; ‘in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left’ (2 Cor 6:6-7)” (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, paragraph 401.1). The minister of Christ “must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,<sup>8</sup> but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled,<sup>9</sup> holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching . . . able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” (Titus 1:7-9, NASB).

In order to be a good steward of God’s Story one must, among other things, give oneself to careful and systematic study, both before and after ordination. This will occur not because he or she is forced to do so, but out of a love for God and His people, the world He is working to redeem, and out of an inescapable sense of responsibility. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the attitude one brings to preparation for the ministry reveals much about what he or she thinks of God, the gospel, and Christ’s Church. The God who became incarnate in Jesus and who made a way of salvation for all gave His very best in the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. In order to be a good steward, a Christian minister must respond in kind. Jesus told numerous parables about stewards who did not recognize the importance of what had been entrusted to them (Mt 21:33-44; 25:14-30; Mk 13:34-37; Lk 12:35-40; 19:11-27; 20:9-18).

Preparation for ministry in Christ’s Church—one’s education in all its dimensions— should be pursued in full light of the responsibility before God and His people that the ministry involves. This requires that one take advantage of the best educational resources at his or her disposal.

The Church of the Nazarene recognizes how large is the responsibility associated with the ordained Christian ministry and accepts it fully. Part of the way we recognize our responsibility before God is seen in the requirements we make for ordination and the practice of ministry. We believe the call to and practice of Christian ministry is a gift, not a right or privilege. We believe God holds a minister to the highest of religious, moral, personal, and professional standards. We are not reluctant to expect those standards to be

observed from the time of one's call until his or her death. We believe Christian ministry should first be a form of worship. The practice of ministry is both an offering to God and a service to His Church. By the miracle of grace, the work of the ministry can become a means of grace for God's people (Rom 12: 1-3). One's education for ministry is also a form of worship.

The modules comprising the Course of Study that may lead a person to candidacy for ordination have been carefully designed to prepare one for the kind of ministry we have described. Their common purpose is to provide a holistic preparation for entrance into the ordained Christian ministry. They reflect the Church's wisdom, experience, and responsibility before God. The modules show how highly the Church of the Nazarene regards the gospel, the people of God, the world for which Christ gave His life, and Christian ministry. Completing the modules will normally take three or four years. But no one should feel pressured to meet this schedule.

The careful study for which the modules call should show that before God and His Church one accepts the stewardly responsibility associated with ordained ministry.

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## Introduction

### Intended Use of This Faculty Guide

This Faculty Guide serves as an instructor's guide for teaching principles of *Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World* to adult learners who are preparing for ordination in the Church of the Nazarene. The content is based on intended outcomes defined through the collaborative process conducted at Breckenridge, CO, USA, between 1990 and 1997. The materials prepare the pastor-teacher to present the topic by providing background reading, lesson plans, lectures, instructions to the teacher, and teaching resources for each class session. In most lessons complete lectures, questions for guided discussions, and defined learning activities are provided.

The pastor-teacher who will lead this module should hold a master's degree. Ideally, the pastor-teacher should have participated as a student in a module using this material prior to teaching the material to others. This faculty guide assumes that the pastor-teacher has some basic understanding of communicating the gospel in a pluralistic world, sociology, philosophy, and missiology.

It is further assumed that learners participating in a module using this material will be high school graduates and be adult learners beyond the traditional college age. Learners are assumed to be motivated to learn, and to have adult life-experiences. No prior college classroom experience is assumed on the part of the learners.

## Acknowledgments

Every module is the accumulation of effort by many people. Someone writes the original manuscript, others offer suggestions to strengthen the content and make the material more easily understood, and finally an editor formats the module for publication. This module is not different. Many people have contributed to this module. Every effort has been made to represent accurately the original intent of the principal contributors.

### Principal Contributor

The principal contributor for this module is Dr. Al

Truesdale. Dr. Truesdale received an A.B. from Trevecca Nazarene College (now University), a B.D. from Nazarene Theological Seminary, and a Ph.D. from Emory University. He has had pastoral experience in North Carolina, Georgia, and Massachusetts. He served on the faculty of Eastern Nazarene College, Olivet Nazarene University, and Nazarene Theological Seminary. He served as academic dean of Olivet Nazarene University and Nazarene Theological Seminary. He also served as interim academic dean and interim president of Eastern Nazarene College.

Dr. Truesdale is a prolific writer, authoring many books and magazine articles. He has also co-authored and co-edited several publications, and contributed chapters to many books. Recent works include: *When You Can't Pray: Finding Hope When You're Not Experiencing God*; and *A Charge to Keep: Telling the Story in a Pluralistic World* (publication pending).

Dr. Truesdale's research interests include: philosophy of religion in modern novels, world religions, bioethics, and the problem of evil.

Dr. Truesdale and Esther reside in Seabrook, South Carolina. They have three daughters (Elizabeth, Rebecca, and Brenda) and two grandchildren (Suzy and Joshua).

### **Responder**

Each module was reviewed by at least one content specialist to ensure that the content did not represent a single, narrow view or opinion. The responder provided suggestions the principal contributor could integrate into this module.

The responder for this module is Dr. Diane Leclerc. Dr. Leclerc is professor of historical theology and homiletics at Northwest Nazarene University where she has taught since 1998. She is an ordained elder in the Church of the Nazarene and has pastored two congregations in Maine and in Idaho. She received the bachelor of arts in religion from Eastern Nazarene College, the master of divinity degree from Nazarene Theological Seminary, and both her master of philosophy and Ph.D. degrees from Drew University.

She has published articles in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* and has contributed to two books, including *Heart Religion in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*. Her full-length book, *Singleness of Heart: Gender, Sin, and Holiness in Historical Perspective*, won the Wesleyan Theological Society Book of the Year

Award in 2002. Leclerc is an active member of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy Association. She resides in Nampa, Idaho, with her husband and son.

## Revision History

*Fourth Quarter 2007*, Revision 3, the current version,

- Lessons were keyed to recommended text, *With Cords of Love*, 2006.

*Third Quarter 2005*, Revision 2, the current version,

- Text edited for gender inclusiveness.

*First Quarter 2005*. Revision 1,

- The Lesson Overview, Introduction, Body, Close format was established.

## Intended Outcomes for the Module

The *Manual*, Church of the Nazarene, and the *International Sourcebook on Developmental Standards for Ordination* define educational preparation for ordination. Additionally, each region of the International Church of the Nazarene has developed educational guidelines to qualify educational programs for ordination offered within their region.

The USA Region *Sourcebook for Ministerial Development* defines outcomes for the overall ministerial development program. The module assists candidates in developing these skills. Other modules in the program may also address the same outcomes. The specific outcomes that relate to this module are:

### Program Outcomes

- CN 22 Ability to articulate the distinctive characteristics of Wesleyan theology
- CP 15 Ability to think globally and engage cross-culturally for the purpose of mission
- CP 16 Ability to preach evangelistically and to be engaged with and equip others in personal and congregational evangelism
- CX 1 Ability to discover sociological dynamics and trends and to apply that information to specific ministry settings
- CX 8 Ability to place the ministry context in light of the large schemes of world and national history
- CX 9 Ability to apply historical analysis to the life of a local congregation in order to describe its historical and cultural context
- CX 10 Ability to understand and articulate the biblical, historical, and theological bases for Christian mission

## About This Module

A module is composed of two major works—a Faculty Guide and a Student Guide. Both are necessary for the whole body of information and learning activities pertaining to the module topic. You will need a copy of both.

We have tried to design this module to be flexible and easy to adapt to your situation. You as the instructor will need to be familiar with the information, activities, questions, and homework provided in both works. In some cases you may need to modify the illustrations or questions to meet the needs of your group.

### Rationale

Christian discipleship and ministry in a world marked by a diversity of world religions is not new for the Church. Many of the early Christians had “turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming” (1 Thess 1:9-10). But a postmodern, pluralistic ideology is new, at least two centuries in the making. The ideology of religious pluralism claims that not only are there many religions but also that the diversity represents the way things “ought to be.” There exists no single religious perception of reality that is universally applicable and binding. No religion can legitimately claim to proclaim the truth for all persons. There is no *metanarrative*, no overarching story. There are many narratives, all of which are “true” to the extent they satisfactorily provide meaning for all persons and communities who participate in them. Religious narratives are as diverse and “true” as there are narrative communities.

Pluralism may, but need not, rest upon the notion that behind the various narratives lies *a single divine reality* variously and legitimately expressed in humankind’s many cultures and communities. According to the postmodern ideology of religious pluralism, any religion that claims to have “the narrative” for all persons, and that tries to proselytize accordingly, ought to be judged as oppressive. This is because by so doing, it spreads injury in the world. It tyrannizes the human conscience and overwhelms human freedom. According to the ideology of religious pluralism, orthodox Christian doctrine as expressed in the New Testament and the Church’s creeds is a holdover from the long night of human ignorance and oppression. Christianity

either needs to be made a participating and respectful member of the human community, or it needs to be abandoned.

That is part of the atmosphere in which the Christian faith exists. Religious pluralism presents its own set of challenges and opportunities.

Paradoxically, religious pluralism exists in a world also marked by resurgent religious fundamentalism and extremism. Where these dominate a society and state, religious pluralism does not exist. Particularly in many Muslim countries, the powers of state are used to prevent religious diversity, and even more so the ideology of religious pluralism.

In its broader sense, *pluralism* refers to more than just “religious pluralism.” We also speak of moral, cultural and political pluralism. The various “pluralisms” depend on the notion that “meaning” is contextual. “Right” and “wrong” are dependent on a community’s—or one’s own—preferences and the “story” by which a community lives. The “moral” depends upon the values a community cherishes, nurtures, and transmits. The traditional notion that moral values must submit to judgment by some universal or transcendent norm is rejected. That discredited standard reveals an ignorance of how communities and values are actually formed.

In this module we will concentrate on religious pluralism. How is one to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic world? More specifically, how is one to do this from within a Wesleyan perspective? Those are the questions this module addresses. If one were to be satisfied with ignoring the pluralistic context in which we live, the content of this module would be unnecessary. But choosing this option would thereby limit the range of the Church’s ministry. It would deny the power of the gospel, and it would not adequately represent the Wesleyan tradition. To proclaim the gospel in a way that pays attention to the context in which we speak, we must take seriously the pluralism that so extensively characterizes our age.

A minister in the Church of the Nazarene cannot adequately serve the church’s mission if he or she chooses not to be cognizant of pluralism’s importance and profile. Our commitment to an informed ministry will not permit it. In our Articles of Faith we affirm orthodox Christian theology. This affirmation puts the denomination at odds with the pluralistic spirit. Because we embrace the “scandal of the Cross and

Resurrection” we reject the ideology of religious pluralism.

In keeping with historic Christian faith, we proclaim Jesus Christ to be the definitive revelation of the Triune God. We believe that in Jesus Christ the universal reign of God has begun, is advancing by the Spirit, and will be consummated in God’s own time. We make these affirmations in ways that distinctly show the influence of the Wesleyan theological tradition. In the Wesleyan tradition—when communicating the gospel—we rely upon the persuasive Holy Spirit, not upon any form of intellectual, political, or social coercion.

The purpose of this module is to help prepare Christian ministers in the Church of the Nazarene—the Wesleyan tradition—for ministry in a religiously pluralistic world.

### **Notes from the Original Author**

The purpose of the material in Lessons 3 and 4 is to acquaint students with postmodernity as it affects religious pluralism. Some of the concepts and descriptions may be new to some of your students. Many of us are still trying to come to grips with postmodernity in its various forms. The lectures use Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Christians on a Spiritual Journey* (Jossey-Bass, 2001) to present postmodernity in understandable terms. The lessons also briefly present the conceptual framework that lies behind some of postmodernity’s popular expressions. No full-scale discussion of postmodernity is attempted. Our interest lies only in how it bears on religious pluralism.

The readings in the Student Guide are meant to provide background for understanding, certainly not to endorse all that is said or those who speak.

The author assumes that in the Church of the Nazarene, Article IV of *The Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene* warrants appeal to the Scriptures as providing a correct Christian response to religious pluralism. Hence, no defense for appeal to the Scriptures is given. Appealing to the Old and New Testaments as authoritative when discussing religious pluralism would strike many as primitive and parochial, unbecoming of informed and respectful persons. This author knows the reasons for the objection and willingly bears the scorn. The ideology of religious pluralism is one of today’s most prominent occasions for “the scandal of the cross” (1 Cor 1:18-31).

The module is confessional in nature. It is predicated upon the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord of lords and King of kings. The module intentionally seeks to be faithful to apostolic faith and doctrine. Accordingly, there is no intention of identifying the Christian faith as just one more acceptable religious option among others. Nor is there any attempt to muffle evangelism when practiced in line with Wesleyan theology.

If you as the instructor wish to discuss the concepts discussed in any of the lessons, please feel free to contact the author by e-mail, [altruesdale@islc.net](mailto:altruesdale@islc.net) or by telephone, 843-846-1500.

### **Module Development**

One reason for developing this module is for the benefit of extension education. We understand that teachers all over the world are called upon to teach courses not in their area of specialty, but they teach them because they want to see pastors trained and leaders developed for the church. Extension education is basic to rapid church growth. We want to provide this as a resource for extension educators. If it helps others along the way, that's fine too.

Another reason for developing this module is to equip indigenous faculty. We believe a class like this is best taught and contextualized by someone from within the culture of the students. Many fine teachers, who are leaders in our churches around the world, do not have higher degrees in theology but have the skills to teach a module like this effectively. We want to set them free to do so, and in so doing, to actually improve the module and make it more dynamic and meaningful for their context than it would have been had we held onto it and insisted on teaching it ourselves.

## **About This Faculty Guide**

*Note: It is critical to remember that active participation by the learners will enhance their learning. That means you will not be an information giver. This module is not about you. The focus of the module is helping students learn. Your role is to design an environment in which your students will learn. Sometimes you will give lectures. At other times you will guide discussions or assign your students to work in groups. These kinds of activities keep the*

The faculty guide has been written to guide an instructor as he or she prepares to teach this module. It contains complete lesson plans and resources to provide a solid educational design for the topic. You will need to prepare for each lesson well in advance of the meeting time. Often there are background reading suggestions for the instructor, or you may know additional reference materials you want to interject into the lesson. Questions intended to be answered or discussed by the students are in italic type.

*participants actively involved in the learning process. Learning is a team activity.*

**A two-column format was chosen for the faculty guide.** The right-hand column contains the content of lectures, descriptions of activities, and questions to keep students involved. The left-hand column is to give suggested instructions to you, the teacher. It also contains examples you can use to illustrate concepts in the lectures. Whenever possible you should use examples from your own experience and from your students' real-life context.

Large white space has been left in the left column to allow you to write notes and personalize the faculty guide.

**The faculty guide has three major components:** the Faculty Guide Introduction, the Lesson Plans, and the Teaching Resources. The Introduction and Lesson Plans are in this document and the Resources are contained in the companion student guide. You are reading the Faculty Guide Introduction now. It provides a teaching philosophy for adult learners, background information for organizing the module, and ideas about conducting the lessons.

**Each section of the faculty guide is numbered** with a two-part page number. Page 5 of Lesson 3 would be numbered "3-5." The first number is the lesson number and the second is the page number within the lesson. Each resource sheet is numbered for the lesson in which the resource is first used. The first resource page for Lesson 2 is numbered "2-1."

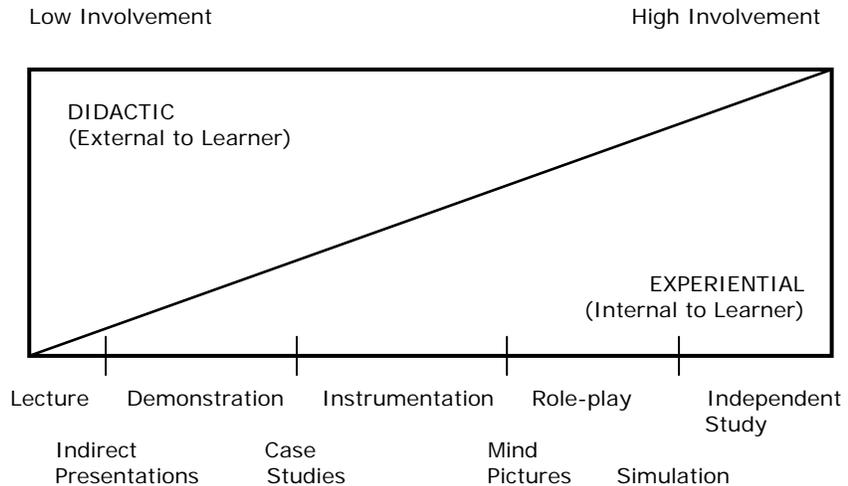
**The Lesson Plans are complete in themselves.** They contain an Overview, Introduction, Body, and Close. The Lesson Overview provides you with a planning tool for preparing and conducting each lesson.

*The Lesson Introduction* should get participants' attention, orient them to the place this lesson holds in the overall module, define the intended objectives, and prepare them for the learning activities.

*The Lesson Body* is the core message of the lesson. The key is to keep the learners actively involved. Even in lectures, ask questions that prompt learners to think about the content, not just hear the lecture.

The following chart shows a continuum of learner involvement in different teaching methods. Lecture requires the least learner involvement, and independent study requires the most learner involvement.

## METHODS CONTINUUM



A variety of learning activities are used to present information and allow learners to experiment with their new knowledge. Each learner has a set of preferred methods of learning and has different life experiences that can color or filter what one actually learns. A variety of learning activities help adults adapt to the learning task—by hearing, by doing, by reading, by discussing, or by combinations of these. The learners should have opportunities to test and clarify their new learning by talking with the instructor and other participants, and applying new knowledge in real or contrived situations as soon as possible.

*The Lesson Close* provides a time for answering questions, reviewing the information, connecting this lesson to future lessons, making assignments, and punctuating the finish. The close does not provide any new information but gives a sense of closure to the lesson.

**Homework assignments** are important learning activities. They provide the student with an opportunity to synthesize classroom learning. Working on these assignments also extends the learning experience beyond the time constraints of class time.

The student—especially the adult student—needs frequent and timely feedback about his or her learning. While interaction with other students helps the learner refine what he or she is learning, feedback from the instructor is also critical to the quality of learning and

ultimately to his or her persistence in the Course of Study.

It is your responsibility as the instructor for this module to provide students with timely responses to homework assignments in order to enhance the learning process. Reviewing and responding to homework will also provide you with critical information about what your students are learning and whether or not the teaching-learning process is succeeding.

Since these modules are preparing the learner for ordination rather than leading to a university degree, a letter grade may not be appropriate. Your response to the learners' assignments should be thoughtful and in most cases it should be written. Its purpose will always be to refine and enhance the learning of the student.

**Teaching Resources** are reproduced in the student guide. Each resource sheet is numbered for the lesson in which the resource is first used. The first resource page for Lesson 2 is numbered "2-1."

You must determine how each resource will be used in your context. If an overhead projector is available, transparencies can be made by replacing the paper in your photocopier with special transparency material.

The student guide for this module contains the series foreword, acknowledgments, syllabus, copies of all resources, lesson objectives, and assignments. A copy of the student guide should be made available to each student.

**Recommendations for printing** You may print this faculty guide if desired. The introduction and lesson plan segments are formatted for printing on both sides of the paper. The resource pages of the student guide should be printed on one side for use as transparency or handout masters.

The student guide should be printed on one side.

## About the Student Guide

The Student Guide for this module contains the series foreword, acknowledgments, syllabus, all resources, lesson objectives, and assignments. The Student Guide should be made available to each student in either hard copy or electronic format—CD or floppy disk.

Each resource sheet in the Student Guide is numbered at the top for the lesson in which the resource is first used. The first resource page for Lesson 2 is numbered "2-1." In the Faculty Guide, in the left-hand column, you will be informed when to refer to the appropriate resource.

The first page for each lesson

- Reminds the student of the assignments that are due
- States the learner objectives
- Gives instructions for homework assignments
- Sometimes includes relevant quotes

For each lesson, there are several support pieces, which we have called simply "resources." They help guide the flow of the lesson. Some resources are basic outlines that guide the student through a lecture. Others direct small-group activities. For some lessons, data/statistic resources are given. And for some modules homework assignment information resources are included.

You must determine how each resource will be used in your context. If an overhead projector is available, then transparencies can be made by replacing the paper in your photocopy machine with special transparency material. They also can be used as part of a PowerPoint presentation.

The instructor may print or photocopy resources to use for his or her own lecture outlines. There is space to add notes from the Faculty Guide, from a textbook, or from the additional suggested readings. Add in your own illustrations too!

**Recommendation for printing.** For student use it would be best to print the Student Guide on one side of the paper.

## Suggested Meeting Schedule

The module lessons are designed to last 90 minutes each. Each lesson is complete in itself with an opening, a middle, and a closing. They are sequential. Each lesson assumes the learners have mastered material presented in previous lessons. The lessons can be grouped in a variety of ways to accommodate the schedules of your learners.

When lessons are taught in the same meeting, instructors will need to adjust homework assignments because participants will not have time between lessons to prepare homework. It is very important for the instructor always to be looking ahead and planning for upcoming lessons.

Here are three suggestions (out of many) for ways the meetings can be organized.

1. Resident campus: The class can meet two days a week for 90 minutes. Present one lesson per meeting time. Total time: 6 weeks.
2. Extension education: The class can meet one day—or evening—each week for 3 to 3½ hours. Present two lessons per meeting with a break period between lessons. Participants will need to travel to a centralized location for meetings, so make it worth their time. Total time: 6 weeks.
3. Intensive module: The class can meet three consecutive days for 7 to 8 hours per day. Present two lessons in the morning with a break period between lessons, and two lessons in the afternoon with another break period between the lessons. Participants must complete reading assignments before arriving at the module site, and written assignments can be submitted 30 to 60 days following the class meeting. Total meeting time: 3 days. Elapsed time including reading and written assignments: 2 to 3 months.

The module is divided into 12 lessons. The progression of these lessons can be seen in the chart below. Space is given for you to fill in the dates when your class sessions will meet.

Date	Lesson
	1. The Various Meanings of Pluralism
	2. A Brief History of Religious Pluralism
	3. The Influence of the Modern Era on Religious Pluralism
	4. The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism
	5. Responses to Religious Pluralism among Christians
	6. The New Testament and Religious Pluralism

	7. The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Prevenient Grace, the Gift of Faith, Justification
	8. The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Sanctification
	9. A Wesleyan Response to Non-Christian Religions, Part 1
	10. A Wesleyan Response to Non-Christian Religions, Part 2
	11. Communicating the Gospel in a Religiously Pluralistic World
	12. Student Accountability

## Recommended Textbooks

Each module within the Modular Course of Study is intended to be textbook independent. This does not imply that the modules are textbook irrelevant, or that the module content cannot be enriched by selecting and requiring that students study a textbook along with the lessons provided in this faculty guide.

If these modules are adapted for use outside of the English-speaking countries of North America, a specific textbook may not be available in the language of the students. Therefore, the module does not rely on one textbook. The instructor may select any doctrinally sound textbook available to the students.

Lessons in this module are keyed to the recommended text

Truesdale, Al and Keri Mitchell. *With Cords of Love: A Wesleyan Response to Religious Pluralism*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006.

## Suggested Books for the Student's Library

For those students interested in acquiring books for their personal library, the following would be recommended as good books for this module topic:

Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

McLaren, Brian D. A. *New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2001.

Netland, Harold. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Runyon, Theodore. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.

Smith, Chuck. *The End of the World . . . As We Know It: Clear Direction for Bold and Innovative Ministry in a Postmodern World*. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001.

Starkey, Lycurgus M. *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Sweet, Leonard. *Post-Modern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000.

All or most of these books can be purchased as used books at <http://www.abebooks.com/>.

## A Hidden Agenda

### **Hidden curriculum issues . . . because the way we teach teaches**

In each session, there are certain methodological and environmental things to consider.

**First**, consider the classroom arrangement. Whenever possible, the room should be arranged to encourage a sense of community. Either the group should sit in a circle or around a table. If the group is very large, chairs can be arranged for easily moving into clusters for discussion.

**Second**, consider how you present yourself as teacher. Standing behind a lectern with your students facing you in rows says you are above the students and have something to give them (although in a very large group this standing to teach may be unavoidable). Sitting as part of the circle makes the teacher a co-learner at the same level as the students. Speak naturally. Pay close attention to your students, and value the things they share. Learn their names. Encourage participation. Remember that you are modeling for them, and the way you teach will teach them far more than the words you say.

**Third**, invite the Holy Spirit's presence in the classroom. Do this each time the class meets.

**Fourth**, the sharing-of-stories activity does more than help the students begin to reflect on their own Christian experiences. It is a way to build community between the students. This is more than an exercise to be checked off. It is vital to set the tone of your intentional community.

When meeting times exceed 90 minutes, consider adding break times. The break between segments is an important time for community building. Remain available to the students during this time. Consider offering coffee or tea during this time as a way to encourage fellowship.

## Journaling: The Key to Spiritual Formation

Journaling is a major assignment of each module in the Course of Study. It is the integrating element that helps draw spiritual meaning and ministerial application from the content of each module whether the module concentrates on content, competency, character, or context. It ensures that the "Be" component of "Be, Know, and Do" is present in every module in which one participates. What is journaling and how can it be meaningfully accomplished?

*The Syllabus contains this explanation of journaling. Journaling provides the spiritual formation component for the module and is an integral part of the learning experience.*

*Have students read the journaling section during the Syllabus review in Lesson 1 and emphasize that journaling is an assignment for each lesson in the module.*

*When giving assignments in each lesson, assign journal writing each time the group meets.*

### **Journaling: A Tool for Personal Reflection and Integration**

Participating in the Course of Study is the heart of your preparation for ministry. To complete each module you will be required to listen to lectures, read books and articles, participate in discussions, and write papers. Content mastery is the goal.

An equally important part of ministerial preparation is spiritual formation. Some might choose to call spiritual formation devotions, while others might refer to it as growth in grace. Whichever title you place on the process, it is the intentional cultivation of your relationship with God. The module work will be helpful in adding to your knowledge, your skills, and your ability to do ministry. The spiritual formation work will weave all you learn into the fabric of your being, allowing your education to flow freely from your head through your heart to those you serve.

Although there are many spiritual disciplines to help you cultivate your relationship with God, journaling is the critical skill that ties them all together. Journaling simply means keeping a record of your experiences and the insights you have gained along the way. It is a discipline because it does require a good deal of work faithfully to spend daily time in your journal. Many people confess this is a practice they tend to push aside when pressed by their many other responsibilities. Even five minutes a day spent journaling can make a major difference in your education and your spiritual development. Let me explain.

Consider journaling time spent with your best friend. Onto the pages of a journal you will pour out your candid responses to the events of the day, the insights you gained from class, a quote gleaned from a book, and an 'ah-ha' that came to you as two ideas connected. This is not the same as keeping a diary, since a diary seems to be a chronicle of events without the personal dialogue. The journal is the repository for all of your thoughts, reactions, prayers, insights, visions, and plans. Though some people like to keep complex journals with sections for each type of reflection, others find a simple running commentary more helpful. In either case, record the date and the location at the beginning of every journal entry. It will help you when it comes time to review your thoughts.

It is important to chat briefly about the logistics of journaling. All you will need is a pen and paper to begin. Some folks prefer loose-leaf paper that can be placed in a three-ring binder, others like spiral-bound notebooks, while others enjoy using composition books. Whichever style you choose, it is important to develop a pattern that works for you.

Establishing a time and a place for writing in your journal is essential. If there is no space etched out for journaling, it will not happen with the regularity needed to make it valuable. It seems natural to spend time journaling after the day is over and you can sift through all that has transpired. Yet family commitments, evening activities, and fatigue militate against this time slot. Morning offers another possibility. Sleep filters much of the previous day's experiences, and processes deep insights, that can be recorded first thing in the morning. In conjunction with devotions, journaling enables you to begin to weave your experiences with the Word, and also with module material that has been steeping on the back burner of your mind. You will probably find that carrying your

journal will allow you to jot down ideas that come to you at odd times throughout the day.

It seems we have been suggesting that journaling is a handwritten exercise. Some may be wondering about doing their work on a computer. Traditionally, there is a special bond between hand, pen, and paper. It is more personal, direct, and aesthetic. And it is flexible, portable, and available.

With regular use, your journal is the repository of your journey. As important as it is to make daily entries, it is equally important to review your work. Read over each week's record at the end of the week. Make a summary statement and note movements of the Holy Spirit or your own growth. Do a monthly review of your journal every 30 days. This might best be done on a half-day retreat where you can prayerfully focus on your thoughts in solitude and silence. As you do this, you will begin to see the accumulated value of the Word, your module work, and your experience in ministry all coming together in ways you had not considered possible. This is integration—weaving together faith development and learning. Integration moves information from your head to your heart so that ministry is a matter of being rather than doing. Journaling will help you answer the central question of education: "Why do I do what I do when I do it?"

Journaling really is the linchpin in ministerial preparation. Your journal is the chronicle of your journey into spiritual maturity as well as content mastery. These volumes will hold the rich insights that will pull your education together. A journal is the tool for integration. May you treasure the journaling process!

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## Lesson 1

# The Various Meanings of Pluralism

## Lesson Overview

### Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:20	Pluralism Defined	Lecture	Resource 1-1 Resource 1-2
0:40	Class Response	Guided Discussion	
0:55	Encountering Pluralism	Small Groups	Resource 1-3
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### Suggested Reading for Instructor

Eck, Diana L. *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. San Francisco: Harper, 2002.

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Truesdale, Al. *With Cords of Love*. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006. Chapter 1.

# Lesson Introduction

(20 minutes)

## Orientation

*Spend some time going over the Syllabus in the Student Guide.*

*Make sure each student knows how to reach you by e-mail or phone.*

*You may want to send around a sign-up sheet for the students to give you their e-mail or phone numbers.*

*Point out the Series Foreword and Journaling essays. Read through the Module Vision Statement.*

*Familiarize the students with the schedule and requirements. Under "Course Requirements" the section on Journaling is a different statement/directions from other modules. The students need to know what is required of them for this assignment for this module..*

*For the "Interviews" assignment you may want to list all the possibilities within your area and either have students choose or assign the religions. Not everyone has to have totally different religions, but it would be good if there were a good representation of the possibilities.*

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson.*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- be able to define and discuss the following meanings of pluralism: political pluralism, philosophical pluralism, cultural pluralism, moral pluralism, and religious pluralism

## Motivator

*Letter 6: "On the Presbyterians" (1732), Letters on England, Wisconsin Center for Pluralism, <http://www.wisresearch.org/plural.htm>*

"If there were only one religion in England there would be danger of despotism, if there were two, they would cut each other's throats, but there are thirty, and they live in peace and happiness."

Voltaire (1694—1778), French writer/philosopher

*Diana Eck, "A New Religious America: Managing Religious Diversity in a Democracy: Challenges and Prospects for the 21st Century Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia," Keynote Address, MAAS International Conference on Religious Pluralism in Democratic Societies (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, August 20-21, 2002), <http://www.usembassymalaysia.org.my/eck.html>. Professor Dr. Diana L. Eck is professor of comparative religion and Indian studies, Harvard University, USA. Dr. Eck is the director of the Pluralism Project of Harvard University.*

"I would insist that pluralism is not simply relativism. It does not displace or eliminate deep religious commitments, or secular commitments for that matter. It is, rather, the encounter of commitments. Some critics have persisted in linking pluralism with a kind of valueless relativism, in which all cats are gray, all perspectives equally viable and, as a result, equally unconvincing. Pluralism, they would contend, undermines commitment to one's own particular faith with its own particular language, watering down particularity in the interests of universality. I consider this view a distortion of the process of pluralism. I would argue that pluralism is the engagement, not the abdication, of differences and particularities. While the encounter with people of other faiths in a pluralist society may lead one to a less myopic view of one's own faith, pluralism is not premised on a reductive relativism, but on the significance and the engagement of real differences . . . The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. In the world in which we live today, the language of dialogue is a language we will need to learn."

# Lesson Body

## Lecture: Pluralism Defined

(20 minutes)

### Introduction

One of the most prominent challenges the Christian faith faces today is religious pluralism. This is true even while perverse forms of religious fanaticism spread terror around the globe. Religious pluralism is particularly challenging for those committed to what the New Testament, and the apostolic tradition (as presented, for example, in the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Creed of Chalcedon) claim regarding the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. *The Articles of Faith* of the Church of the Nazarene make clear that we firmly stand in this tradition.

Nevertheless, the world as we now know it will not permit thoughtful and informed Christians simply to dismiss other religions and the cultures often associated with them. Religions other than Christianity not only continue to occupy their historic places of concentration, but increasingly share the western spaces that for centuries were recognized as "Christian." And they claim our attention as perhaps never before. This doesn't mean there was ever a time when Christians could simply dismiss other religions, or that the West was ever reserved for Christians alone, but in many ways the relative insulation that once marked most of Europe and North America has simply disappeared.

Because of the rapidly increasing number of Muslims in Western Europe, we are now becoming accustomed to the term "Eurabia." As a result of rising immigration from the south and the east, there are now between 15 and 20 million Muslims within the European Union, or between 3 and 5 percent of the population. Observers debate whether or not Muslim youth can be successfully integrated into secular European society, or whether they will be largely radicalized as a result of poverty, social marginalization, and antisecular, antidemocratic rhetoric preached by radical imams.

The presence of mosques, Hindu temples, Sikh communities, and Buddhist monasteries in the United States is commonplace. Beyond the presence of such traditional religions, we are witnessing an explosion of

*Niall Ferguson, "The Widening Atlantic," The Atlantic Monthly, January/February 2005, 40.*

new religious forms, as well as a “revival” of ancient practices such as Wicca.

David B. Barrett, et al, eds. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World, 2 Vols (2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 2001)*. Barrett's claim may be read in Toby Lister, “Oh, Gods,” *The Atlantic Monthly (Feb 2002)*, *The Atlantic Monthly Archives* located at <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2002/02/lester.htm>.

David B. Barrett, editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* and a former missionary to Africa, has identified 9,900 distinct religions in the world. He says the number is increasing by two or three new religions every day.

In some corners, Christian ministers may still have the “luxury” of ignoring the questions religious pluralism poses for Christians. But those “safe preserves” are rapidly disappearing. Far more importantly, if we believe the Gospel of God as manifested in Jesus of Nazareth to be God’s good news for all, and if we are as prepared for Christian ministry as we should be, then we will not wait for religious pluralism to chase us out of our safety zones. Instead, we will actively and wisely engage this prominent reality of our time.

In order to engage religious pluralism in a manner that is faithful to the nature and content of the gospel of God, we will have to be good students of both the gospel and the world in which we minister. We will have to be thoroughly tutored by the Scriptures and Christian doctrine. We will have to be intelligently sensitive to and instructed by the whole pluralistic context. We will have to ask the Holy Spirit to correct our misperceptions and to forgive our misrepresentations of others. He will have to teach us how to bear witness to the gospel in ways that present the Savior as the Lord whom the world can recognize as its true Hope, and not as an oppressor who runs roughshod over consciences, contexts, and histories.

This module is predicated upon the conviction that the One in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily is now conveniently present in all persons, working through the Holy Spirit to draw them to himself. It is also predicated upon the conviction that those who bear witness to Christ in the world must always do so in ways that conform to the character of the Father, who loved the world so much He gave His only begotten Son for its redemption. That, I believe, is the spirit of the Wesleyan tradition. In this spirit the module will develop, all the while attempting to be faithful to apostolic Christian faith—also a Wesleyan characteristic.

Any form of evangelism that relies upon oppression, political, cultural, or economic power, or exploitation of any kind is inherently sub-Christian and unworthy of the gospel of God (2 Cor 4:1-6).

## Definitions

*Refer to Resource 1-1 in the Student Guide.*

The basic meaning of “plural” is “more than one.” The words “plurality” and “pluralism” identify a condition marked by the presence of “more than one.” The word “pluralistic” simply describes such a condition. If the word “pluralism” is used only to *describe* a situation, for example, “Democracy is one form of government,” then no *evaluation* of that condition has occurred. The description is “value neutral.” But if we were to say, “Democracy ought to be the only form of government in the world,” we would have spoken “prescriptively.” Our language would be “value laden.” When working with religious pluralism, we will encounter both forms of speech.

*The various forms are offered as resources for the instructor. He or she should use his or her judgment as to how much attention to give each one.*

Let’s consider four forms of pluralism besides religious pluralism. The four are: political pluralism, philosophical pluralism, political pluralism, and moral pluralism.

### Political Pluralism

In political science, political pluralism can refer to the belief that in liberal, representative democracies, power is—or should be—spread among a variety of economic and ideological pressure groups. Power should not be left to a single group of privileged persons. Political pluralism assumes that diversity is beneficial for society. The diverse functional and/or cultural groups—for example, religion—in a democratic society should enjoy qualified autonomy.

A pluralist political structure is “secular” in nature. That is, the state and religion are separated so as to protect a free exercise of many religious practices. No religion receives from the state a privileged status above others.

Political pluralism can also refer to the theory that pressure groups, not the voting citizens as a whole, govern a democratic society. These organizations—including labor unions, trade and professional associations, environmentalists, civil rights activists, business and financial lobbies, and formal and informal coalitions of like-minded citizens—influence the making and administration of laws and policy. Since the participants in this process constitute only a small fraction of the populace, the public acts mainly as bystanders. This form of pluralism is fueled by the belief that representative democracy doesn’t work as well in practice as it does in theory.

### **Philosophical Pluralism**

Philosophical pluralism refers to any metaphysical theory which claims that reality consists of a multiplicity of distinct, fundamental entities. The philosopher Christian Wolff (1679-1754) first used the term. The philosopher William James later popularized it in *The Will to Believe*. Philosophical pluralism is to be distinguished from monism, the notion that only one kind of entity exists and that all expressions of reality are only so many expressions of that singular entity. Philosophical pluralism is also distinguished from philosophical dualism, the notion that only two kinds of entities or realities exist.

### **Cultural Pluralism**

Cultural pluralism—often called multiculturalism—refers to the diversity of cultures in a country or in the world. It affirms the history, integrity, legitimacy, and beauty of the diverse cultures, and it guards against cultural oppression in all its forms.

Scholars and others give considerable attention to the histories of exploitation that have occurred because one culture thought it should “save” others from their “inferior” cultures. The film, *Rabbit Proof Fence* provides a powerful illustration of one culture’s oppression of another.

Cultural pluralism is in evidence in the public schools of the United States. An Executive Committee Report of the National Education Association reveals that one out of three elementary and secondary school students in the United States come from an ethnic minority family. In California and many other states, minority youngsters make up the majority of the student population.

### **Moral Pluralism**

Moral pluralism is the belief that among humans there is a legitimate diversity of moral ideals and virtues, and the diversity should be respected. There is no uniform moral norm, no uniform set of virtues, and no uniform code of behavior to which all persons ought to conform. A moral pluralist may be, but need not be, a moral relativist.

The philosopher Isaiah Berlin was a *moral pluralist*, but of a particular kind. He was not a moral relativist. He taught that moral values are objective, not merely subjective. But there is a plurality of moral values

For more information about Isaiah Berlin, see <http://www.wolfson.ox.ac.uk/berlin/vl/>

people can embrace even as there is a plurality of cultures and temperaments. Berlin did not believe moral values and ideals amount to no more than preferences. They have more substance than saying, "I like my coffee with milk and you like it without." Berlin taught that if persons are to remain human, they must choose from among the pluralistic configuration of objective values.

A moral pluralist may be a *moral relativist*. A moral relativist maintains that values are *subjective and preferential* only. They have no objective, much less ultimate, basis. What one person values may be seen as inconsequential by another. There is no "god" or ultimate norm, including reason, from which values are derived or by which they might be judged. Values emerge from the experiences and desires of persons and communities. The power of values to govern and judge behavior goes no further.

## Religious Pluralism

Refer to Resource 1-2 in the Student Guide.

Religious pluralism has at least two different meanings.

### First

Religious pluralism often refers to the diversity or "plurality" of religious movements within a nation, geographical area, or the world. Used in this sense, religious pluralism simply "describes" the state of affairs as they are. It does not say anything about the way things "ought" to be. This definition of religious pluralism is value neutral.

The United States is the most religiously diverse nation on earth. Some of the religions in the United States are:

- Afro-Caribbean
- Baha'i
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Confucianism
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Jainism
- Judaism
- Mormonism
- Native American religions
- Neo-paganism
- Shintoism
- Sikhism
- Taoism
- Zoroastrianism

**Second**

Religious pluralism can also refer to a particular theory of religions or worldviews. In this case we refer to religious pluralism in its “ideological” form: the ideology of religious pluralism. It does more than “describe” religious diversity. It asserts that a diversity of religions is the way things “ought to be.” So it is “evaluative” (normative) and not simply “descriptive.” Used in this sense, and as embraced by many—including many Christians—religious pluralism asserts that there is no religious metanarrative, only many smaller narratives. According to this assessment, no religion can legitimately claim to possess and proclaim the truth for all persons. Accordingly, religions are considered “true” to the extent they provide for those (the communities) who embrace them a narrative that sufficiently interprets and embodies perceived reality. Religious narratives are as diverse and “true” as there are narrative communities that embrace them. When understood in this way, religious pluralism is “the belief that multiple religions or secular worldviews are legitimate and valid. Each is true when viewed from within its own culture.”

Diana L. Eck, “The Challenge of Pluralism,” The Pluralism Project, Harvard University, <http://www.pluralism.org/>.

A religion that claims to possess “*the* narrative” for all persons, and that tries to proselytize accordingly, ought rightly to be judged *oppressive*. Such a religion becomes a tyrant over the human conscience within the plethora of religious options. Judging another person’s religion as inferior because it doesn’t conform to one’s own reveals base intolerance and ignorance. It visits harm upon others.

By this “normative” estimate of religious diversity, classical, orthodox Christian doctrine as expressed in the New Testament and the Church’s decisive creeds is an oppressive holdover from the long night of human ignorance. Christianity either needs to be made a respecting member of the human community, or it needs to be abandoned.

Religious pluralism may, but need not, rest upon the notion that behind the diverse narratives there is a single reality, variously and legitimately expressed in humankind’s many cultures and communities.

Many spokespersons for the ideology of religious pluralism believe inter-faith dialogue is needed to nurture pluralism and to protect against bigotry. Diana Eck, head of the Pluralism Project of Harvard University, says dialogue can help us move beyond “plurality” to “pluralism”:

Pluralism and plurality are sometimes used as if they were synonymous. But plurality is just diversity, plain and simple—splendid, colorful, maybe even threatening. Such diversity does not, however, have to affect me. I can observe diversity. I can even celebrate diversity, as the cliché goes. But I have to participate in pluralism . . . Pluralism requires the cultivation of public space where we all encounter one another.

## Guided Discussion: Class Response

(15 minutes)

*Allow for student response and interaction.*

*Ask the students to defend their responses.*

*Is there a common thread that runs through the various meanings of pluralism?*

Give examples of religious diversity in your city or personal experience.

Give instances in which you have observed—either in your reading, conversations, or in the media—any or all of the various meanings of pluralism.

*Is there one form of pluralism that presents a greater challenge to the Christian faith than do the others?*

## Small Groups: Encountering Pluralism

(30 minutes)

*Refer to Resource 1-3 in the Student Guide.*

*Divide the class into three groups. Assign one of the three Readings to each group.*

*Allow about half the time for group discussion and about half for group reports.*

# Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

## Review

*Call on different students to define each of the words (phrases) from the "Learner Objectives."*

## Assign Homework

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

Read Resource 1-4: Immanuel Kant. Prepare three questions or important ideas this reading presented to you. Bring two copies, one to turn in to the instructor and one to keep for group discussion.

Read Resource 1-5.

Begin working on interviews as defined in the Syllabus.

*Truesdale, Al. With Cords of Love. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006.*

Optional Reading: *With Cords of Love* by Al Truesdale, chapter 1.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus.

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## Lesson 2

# A Brief History of Religious Pluralism

## Lesson Overview

### Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	History Overview	Lecture	Resource 2-1
0:30	Immanuel Kant	Small Groups	
0:45	Enlightenment River	Lecture	Resources 2-2—2-5
1:10	Pluralism	Guided Discussion	
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### Suggested Reading for Instructor

Eck, Diana L. *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2002.

Escobar, Samuel. *The New Global Mission: The Gospel from Everywhere to Everyone*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Herrick, James A. *The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Religious Tradition*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Mullins, David George, ed. *Religious Pluralism in the West: An Anthology*. Blackwell Publishers, 1998.

Netland, Harold. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Tiessen, Terrence L. *Who Can Be Saved: Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Truesdale, Al. *With Cords of Love*. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006. Chapter 2.

# Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

## Accountability

*Call on several students to share some of their journal entries pertaining to their observation of pluralism.*

*Collect homework, but not journals.*

*You will need to evaluate the homework, giving feedback on the content and level of thought, but a grade is not necessary as grades are not the measure of completion for a module.*

*Completion is based on attendance, completion of all work, the level of participation, and overall accomplishment of ability statements.*

## Orientation

Like all major social developments, religious pluralism as a judgment about how things “ought to be” has a history. The history of the development of religious pluralism is too diverse to trace in detail in this lesson. But we can take note of some of the major mileposts that appeared along the way. Let’s examine:

- the ancient picture
- the Greco-Roman world
- Christendom
- the Enlightenment
- the importance of historicism
- additional contributing factors
- mature religious pluralism

Our goal is to gain a basic understanding of how we arrived at the current ideology of religious pluralism.

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- understand and be able to discuss the history of religious pluralism from ancient times to its current form as the ideology of religious pluralism

*learners to key information and concepts.*

- understand the similarities and difference between religious pluralism in the Greco-Roman world and the ideology of religious pluralism in its current form
- understand why the worship of Yahweh excludes the ideology of religious pluralism
- understand why the Christian faith did not make peace with religious pluralism in the Greco-Roman world
- understand the contributions the Enlightenment and the modern era have made to the development of religious pluralism
- define and understand the importance of historicism for the development of religious pluralism
- understand the numerous pieces that merged in the modern era to bring the ideology of religious pluralism to maturity

## Motivator

In 1915 the sociologist Horace Kallen, a Jewish immigrant, wrote a much-discussed article in *The Nation*, taking issue with the melting-pot vision of America. He may well be the first to use the term “pluralism” to describe an alternative vision. The article was titled “Democracy versus the Melting Pot.” In it he argued that the “melting pot” ideal is inherently anti-democratic. It collides with America’s foundational principles. After all, one of the freedoms cherished in America is the freedom to be oneself, without erasing the distinctive features of one’s own culture. Kallen saw America’s plurality and its unity in the image of the symphony, not the melting pot. America is a symphony orchestra, sounding not in unison, but in harmony, with all the distinctive tones of our many cultures. He described this as “cultural pluralism.”

*Diana Eck, “A New Religious America: Managing Religious Diversity.”*

# Lesson Body

## Lecture: History Overview

(20 minutes)

*Students of the major themes that mark an era usually have access to the contributing currents that merged to give it birth. This is important because understanding an era's themes requires some acquaintance with their histories. The history of the development of religious pluralism as a conviction that religions of the world should, in the absence of proselytism, respect and obey each other's independent legitimacy, has an identifiable history. That history is far more complex than we can traverse here. Nevertheless, we can name and briefly explain some of the most important elements. Through his or her own research, the instructor may wish to range beyond the boundaries of this lesson. The instructor need not feel bound to cover each point in the lesson. If needed, summaries are appropriate.*

*The development of religious pluralism will be presented principally from the perspective of the West. A more complete overview would include Eastern and Islamic perspectives.*

*Refer to Resource 2-1 in the Student Guide.*

*Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Thompson, Introduction to the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 48-50.*

### The Ancient Picture

In one sense, religious pluralism is nothing new. Archaeological records show that as long ago as the Middle Stone Age Period—beginning about 10,000 BC—ancient humanity venerated a mother-goddess whom it was believed stimulated seeds and made them spring from the ground to grow into edible plants. This period also includes relics that demonstrate a veneration of the sun and moon. In addition, there was probably star and tree worship as well. By the time the succession of various civilizations started, beginning in the Fertile Crescent, religions were well-developed, complete with divine beings, myths of origin, scriptures, hymns, cultic practices, and priests.

We know much about the religious beliefs and practices in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Asia. The earliest scriptures of Hinduism, the *Vedas*, for instance, reach back to 2500 BC.

### The Greco-Roman World

The world into which the gospel came was religiously "old." The Greco-Roman world was religiously diverse. In many ways it was as pluralist as our own world; in many respects even more so. At the top of the heap stood the Cult of the Emperor, the "savior of the world." He was the chief patron of the empire. However, above him were the gods, in relation to whom the Emperor related as client.

Douglas Harink refers to the Cult of the Emperor as "the world religion of the time." This was the religion of imperial Rome, the *Pax Romana*—the Peace of Rome—established under the reigns of Julius Caesar and Augustus. "Augustus especially was hailed as the lord

*Douglas Harink, Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), 209-10.*

and savior of the whole world: he established his own cult and the cult of the goddess *Pax* in Rome and throughout the Roman Empire. The universal rule of the *Pax Romana* was itself the universal reign of the gods of Rome." The novel feature in Rome's attitude toward its empire was a confidence that the empire was both universal and willed by the gods. The Book of Revelation vigorously contradicts Rome's claim.

*Ibid.*, 210.

Imperial Rome was tolerant of many other gods and lords throughout the empire, "so long as they remained merely local, personal, or private, and made no counterclaims about universal truth and world dominion. Ultimately all gods and lords would have to serve and sustain the cause of the Roman Empire."

The empire was awash in gods and lords. There were the gods and goddesses of the Greek and Roman pantheons. Numerous mystery religions had been imported from Egypt and lands to the east. Towns and villages had their own local deities. There were public and private deities, places to worship, images, and statues of the gods and goddesses. There were ritual practices and sacrifices. Seers and oracles, magicians and astrologers, miracle workers and philosophers abounded. As illustrated by the problem Paul deals with in the Letter to the Colossians, most people of the time believed deities, and good and evil spirits, populated the whole world. The many ways for satisfying and manipulating gods and lords formed the backbone of religious ritual and practice.

Mixing the various religious options—syncretism—was common. In 167 BC, for example, Antiochus Epiphanes IV dedicated the Jerusalem Temple to Zeus and placed an idol of Zeus on the altar. He, and the Jews who embraced Hellenism, believed Zeus and Yahweh—the God of the Jews—were one and the same.

But the influence of Hellenism did not have to lead to syncretism. Hellenistic philosophy and culture favorably influenced both Jewish and Christian thought. The author of 4 Maccabees interpreted Judaism in terms of Stoic philosophy. But his theology remained genuinely Jewish. The thought of the eminent Jewish philosopher Philo (25 BC-) reveals the influence of Plato, Stoicism, and neo-Pythagorean thought. The Apostle Paul, the second-century apologists, and the early Church Fathers were influenced by their Hellenistic environment. Many of them fruitfully used Greek and/or Roman philosophy and culture as vehicles for proclaiming the gospel. However, they never tried to harmonize what the Old Testament says regarding

Yahweh being the God beside whom there is none other (Isa 40:12-17; 43:10-13; 45:18-25), and what the New Testament says regarding Christ (1 Cor 15:20-28; 2 Cor 6:14-19; Col 1:9-20) with either the Cult of the Emperor or the empire's religious diversity.

## **Christendom**

Under the reign of Emperor Constantine (c. 280-337) Christianity gained official recognition and preference. With Constantine "Christendom" begins. "Christendom" refers to the close relationship between Church and state that assures favored status for Christianity. It defines the state with reference to its Christian moorings, and the Church with reference to its political power and privilege. Distinctions between Church and state blur. Christianity comes largely to shape culture and its defining institutions under the Church's guidance. But the state also shapes the Church. "Christian" comes to mean largely that one is a baptized communicant and citizen of a Christian state. Christendom characterized most of the West until it was profoundly challenged by the Age of Reason—late 17th and 18th centuries—and the Age of Revolution.

Christendom also characterized the eastern part of the Roman Empire, beginning with Constantine. The churches in the Greek East developed according to theological and ecclesiastical patterns that eventually came to be known as Orthodoxy. Constantinople was its center. The churches in the West developed according to Latin and Roman patterns. The western part of the Church had Rome as its center. There the institution of the papacy developed. For reasons that had been growing almost from the beginning, the Eastern and Western churches formally divided in 1054. In the late 11th and early 12th centuries the Islamic Seljuk Turks conquered Asia Minor. The power of the Eastern Church to shape culture gave way to Muslim domination. But Christians and Jews usually benefited from Muslim protection. One of the ironies of Christian history is that in the controversy between John of Damascus (c. 700-753) who was a Christian official at the court of the Muslim khalif Abdul Malek, and the Western Church over the use of icons, John enjoyed the protection of the Muslim khalif.

Early in the 8th century the Muslims conquered and ruled formerly Christian Spain. Under Muslim rule, Cordoba became the center of a brilliant Islamic culture. For a time, Christians and Jews enjoyed a significant measure of religious toleration. They could

worship freely. Christians retained their churches and property on the condition they pay tribute for each parish, cathedral, and monastery. Working together with Muslims, Christians and Jews made Cordoba into a flourishing and elegant city. Then, in 822 Abd-er Rahman II became the Muslim ruler. Tolerance for Christians and Jews waned, and persecution ensued.

Over against the important instances of peace between Christians, Jews, and Muslims we must place a long and ugly history of conflict. We dare not forget that Christian history bears the indelible scars of the Crusades (1095-1270), in which both Jews and Muslims—and many Eastern Christians—were victimized by Western Christians. Williston Walker says that even if the crusaders thought they were doing something of the highest importance for their souls and for Christ, they were also motivated by “love of adventure, hopes for plunder, desire for territorial advancement and religious hatred.”

*Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 220.*

*For further information on Christian abuses of Muslims see Christian Jihad (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004) by Ergun Mehmet Caner, of Liberty University, and Emir Fethi Caner of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. You can find a review of the book at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/104/42.0.html>.*

The fact that there were provocative acts on the part of the Seljuk Turks diminishes neither the injustices Western Christians visited on Jews, Muslims, and Eastern Christians, nor the hatred for Christianity the Crusades bred. In their book *Christian Jihad*, Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner describe that chapter in the Church's history as “magisterial mayhem, a time when a state-run Church led to blood in the streets.”

*“For your brethren who live in the east are in urgent need of your help, and you must hasten to give them the aid which has often been promised them. . . . I, or rather the Lord, beseech you as Christ's heralds to publish this everywhere and to persuade all people of whatever rank, foot-soldiers and knights, poor and rich, to carry aid promptly to those Christians and to destroy that vile race [the Turks and Arabs] from the lands of our friends. I say this to those who are present, it is meant also for those who are absent. Moreover, Christ commands it.*

*“All who die by the way, whether by land or by sea, or in battle against the pagans, shall have immediate remission of sins. This I grant them through the power of God with which I am invested. O what a disgrace if such a despised and base race, which worships demons, should conquer a people*

*which has the faith of omnipotent God and is made glorious with the name of Christ!" (an excerpt from the address of Pope Urban II (1088-1099) to the Council of Clermont (1095) in which he called the First Crusade. You can read the complete address at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/urban2-5vers.html>.*

*Pope Gregory VII (d. 1085) thought Muslims who obey the Qur'an might find salvation in the bosom of Abraham; St Francis (1181-1226) spoke of Muslims as "brothers"; and Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) introduced "implicit faith" and the "baptism of desire" for those who had not heard, but who would have embraced the gospel had they heard.*

The Church in the West became so powerful throughout most of the Middle Ages that the legitimacy of the secular sphere depended upon the Church's approval. In this atmosphere, religious diversity was discouraged. The Jews were variously tolerated and persecuted. Although there were notable exceptions, the characteristic attitude toward persons of other religions was one of exclusion and condemnation.

Christianity's "lock" on the West continued through the 16th-century Protestant Reformation and the Roman Catholic Counterreformation, waning increasingly beginning with the modern era onward. For centuries, Christianity had shaped the West's overarching and defining narrative.

## **The Enlightenment—the Age of Reason**

In the 18th century, changes began to appear in the West that would forever rupture the long-standing relationship between church and state, between church and culture. The 18th century is known as the Age of Reason, or the Enlightenment.

The Age of Reason is also known as the Age of Revolution. The phrase includes political revolution, the industrial revolution, and scientific and philosophical revolutions. Locke, Diderot, Voltaire, Berkeley, Hume, and Leibniz were just a few of the significant philosophers of the Enlightenment.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant asked, "What is Enlightenment?" and answered, "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage." Tutelage is a person's inability to make use of his or her understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* "Have courage to use your own reason!"

The Age of Reason was the first major and mature phase of modernity. So modernity includes the Age of Reason, but is not synonymous with it. The driving

force behind the Age of Reason was the belief that reason, freed from religious, political, and even philosophical “oppression,” offers the best way forward for human liberation, maturity, happiness, and peace. Characteristic of the Age of Reason was a rejection of all notions that the mind and culture should be placed under the tutelage of religious authority and tradition. For many, the Church came to be seen largely as an obstacle to freedom and human advancement. Many Enlightenment figures looked at the cozy benefits clergy and the Church had received because of their close alliance with the state, and saw an alliance stacked against truth. For them, “enlightenment” entailed a marginalization of religion.

Other Enlightenment figures believed “enlightenment” and Christianity could be made compatible, even though that often entailed major modifications to orthodox Christian belief—Deism. The Enlightenment made significant contributions to the Christian faith, not the least of which was breaking the mold of Constantinian Christianity. We in the Wesleyan tradition attach importance to the role reason plays in religious authority—Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Our understanding of reason has been positively influenced by the Enlightenment. For example, we respect the distinction between the “form of knowing” appropriate to the sciences and the “form of knowing” appropriate to faith. We do not construct artificial conflicts between the two. Wesleyan scholars regularly use benefits of the Enlightenment in their study of the Scriptures, Church history, and systematic theology, all the while adhering to Apostolic faith. A model of this is Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*.

*(San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).*

## Small Groups: Immanuel Kant

(15 minutes)

*Divide the class into groups of about 3 each.*

*Move among the groups listening to the discussions.*

In your group share the questions and important ideas that you prepared from the homework reading.

## Lecture: Enlightenment River

(25 minutes)

*Refer to Resource 2-2 in the Student Guide.*

Numerous currents formed the Enlightenment river. Some of the most important ones were:

1. The period of transition from the Middle Ages to early modernity known as the Renaissance—14th to the beginning of the 17th centuries. A chief feature

of the Renaissance was humanism, a movement that fostered a rebirth of learning that reached back behind the Middle Ages to the ancients. Humanism encouraged a celebration of human creativity, the study of ancient texts, and a creative flowering of art, architecture, and literature. During the Renaissance towns grew, trade flourished, the early seeds of capitalism were sown, and political units increased in size over the medieval fiefdoms.

2. The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, which split Western Christianity, ended Rome's religious monopoly in the West, fed a spirit of revolution, and prompted the rise of nationalism.
3. The age of exploration that followed the close of the Middle Ages. Exploration brought Westerners more and more into contact with religions and cultures of Asia. But even as Western countries explored lands dominated by religions other than Christianity, Christian explorers usually filtered what they observed through Christian and Western lenses. The colossal achievements of Western culture that resulted from the Enlightenment—the formation of capitalism, the industrial revolution, and the advances of modern science—gave the West a sense of superiority. This made it easy to discount and undermine the achievements of other religions and cultures.
4. The ascendancy of nominalism in philosophy. This is the belief that universals are but names for groups of similar entities, not realities independent of particular things. Nominalism, as opposed to realism which argues that universals *are* real, made possible the examination of particular things. It made possible a break from the past—dominated by scholasticism—as governing the future. Modern science would have been impossible apart from nominalism.
5. The emerging empirical sciences that relied upon experimentation rather than upon scholastic tradition. The advances are represented by
  - the work of the 16th-century Polish churchman, **Nikolaus Copernicus**, who established that the sun, not the earth, is the center of the solar system
  - the 17th-century Italian astronomer, **Galileo Galilei**, who further confirmed the heliocentric theory and made contributions in the field of physics

*Donald W. Musser and Joseph L. Price, eds., "Pluralism," A New Handbook of Christian Theology (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 360-61.*

- the 17th-century British mathematician, **Isaac Newton**, who was destined to become one of the greatest scientific geniuses the world has known. Among his many discoveries, Newton's supreme achievement was the formulation of the law of universal gravitation.

One of the most explicit statements of the new scientific—empirical—way of knowing came from the mind of the Englishman Francis Bacon (1561—1626). Bacon gave us the *Novum Organum*, “new way of knowing.” Bacon engaged in a complete revaluation and restructuring of traditional learning. In place of the “old way of knowing” based on tradition, Bacon proposed a method based upon empirical and inductive principles, and the active development of new arts and inventions. The goal of the *Novum Organum* would be to gain practical knowledge that could benefit humankind and relieve human suffering.

The English philosopher David Hume set out to provide a science of humankind that would complement the science of nature.

*The Thirty Years War was the last phase of a series of wars involving religion. After the Reformation, as the religious differences among European people became established along national lines, political conflict intensified. In many instances, questions of religion served only as an excuse to wage war for political ends. The Thirty Years War was a savage struggle waged in Germany from 1618 to 1648. An important cause of the war was the failure of the Peace of Augsburg to settle the religious problems of Germany. The Peace (Treaty) of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years War.*

6. The Wars of Religion. Part of the background for the Age of Reason was the wars of religion that ravaged Europe in the name of God and revelation. The wars of religion discredited Christianity and unintentionally contributed to the appearance of the Age of Reason. The final phase was the savage Thirty Years War (1618-48). Religion had left persons—whole nations—hopelessly divided over “revelation.” Many educated persons—with understandable reason—viewed the Church as incurably divisive and socially destructive. It had obstructed human progress by casting its lot with oppressive kings and by protecting clergy privilege. It had obstructed scientific inquiry and had supported the political and intellectual status quo.
7. Another factor that contributed to a loss of confidence in “divine providence” in history was the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755. It killed an estimated 100,000 people.

It is difficult to overstate the role the Age of Reason played in the emergence of religious pluralism, but its implications are not at all difficult to grasp. Sooner or later, reason would call into question the claims to finality and universality that Christianity had made from the beginning.

Refer to Resource 2-3 in the Student Guide.

For further information regarding historicism's various meanings, see the following web sites:

<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/c/cog-rel.htm>  
<http://www.sou.edu/English/Hedges/Sodashop/RCenter/Theory/Explains/nhistexp.htm>  
<http://en2.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historicism>

## The Importance of Historicism

One of the fruits that grew on the Enlightenment tree is "historicism." It is "scientific method" of historical analysis—"historical criticism"—for studying cultures, religions, eras, institutions, ideas, and so on. The catalyst for its development was the Renaissance and the 17th-century scientific revolution. In his *New Science* (1725) Giambattista Vico gave to us the *verum factum*—roughly, "Just the facts" principle. He stipulated that one can truly know only what one has made, namely, the products of language, civil institutions, and culture. The surest knowledge of a thing—a religion or a culture—we can acquire will come from a study of its origins. Historicism developed from here.

Historicism has played a major role in the development of the ideology of religious pluralism. Because religious pluralism is our interest, we will concentrate on the form of historicism that contributed most to its development. However, it is important to remember that there were, and are, dimensions of historicism that make significant contributions to the Christian faith. These include providing important tools for studying and understanding the Scriptures. Using modern historical methods, scholars help us understand important questions regarding authorship, literary forms—*genres*—the biblical authors used, how the various books were brought to their final forms, and the oral and written traditions behind the texts.

Scholars study the religious and cultural contexts out of which the New Testament and the Early Church arose. The fields of archaeology, anthropology, and sociology are some of the sciences upon which they draw. There are orthodox Christian scholars who utilize all these tools without finding it necessary to embrace the "reductionistic" conclusions many draw from historicism.

*Under the influence of postmodern thought, historicism as defined by Vico, and as developed in the modern era, has come in for massive critique and revision. Many postmodernists say that because of the contextual ("located") nature of our language and knowledge, and the limitations they imposes on us when we try to access other equally "located" historical cultures and languages, we can't know nearly as much as Vico thought we can. Written texts do not and cannot provide access*

The form of historicism that contributed most to the emergence of the ideology of religious pluralism was "reductionistic"—"nothing but" or "nothing more than." Let's explain. Historicism in this form represents a way of evaluating all claims to ultimacy, whether religious, political, philosophical, or moral. The evaluation is that not only do all institutions, all religious beliefs, all scriptures, and the values they champion, have earthly histories, but that is *all they have*. They have only *historical*, and not *transcendent*, origins. All systems of meaning are historically enclosed. A religion's "truth" is relative to those who embrace it, who believe it to be

*to the narrative contexts out of which the texts came. Texts are at least once removed.*

true. No transcendent source is needed to account for its "truth."

Traditionally, in order to establish a religion's legitimacy and power, its adherents have confidently claimed just the opposite. A religion's origin, *cultus*, scriptures, and doctrines came from divine sources and not from those who embrace its meaning.

But historicism in the form we are describing wipes out all such claims. Religions are "accidental." That is, had contingent—accidental—historical circumstances been different, the various religions would either not have emerged or they would have been considerably different. Scientific historical study reveals nothing in the religion that requires more than historical boundaries. While religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are willing to make this "historicist" judgment against other religions, they have not been willing to apply it to themselves. But historicism doesn't play favorites. It applies the historicist rule universally. Belief in all transcendent and ultimate sources/realities dead ends in history. Period!

What gave rise to historicism?

- *First*, as early as the Renaissance, the study of Christianity and its origins began to slip the moorings of Church dogma.
- *Second*, reason was applied to the study of origins without regard for what the religions themselves claimed. Historicism rests upon the belief that for every effect there is a natural cause that can likely be uncovered and observed. Supposed explanations for effects that do not rely upon natural causes are judged illusory, and unworthy of a diligent mind.

When applied to the religions of the world, historicism evaporates all claims to ultimacy, universality, and finality. It supports the ideology of religious pluralism by undercutting all bases for one religion's alleged superiority over another. One may still say his or her religion is "the true one for all persons," or "all religions are evolving in the direction of one's own." But historicism has already sucked all the oxygen out of those claims.

*Allow for response.*

*Do you have any additional thoughts or questions from your homework reading of Resource 1-5?*

*Refer to Resource 2-4 in the Student Guide.*

## Additional Contributing Factors

In the late 19th and 20th centuries many additional factors converged to promote the emergence of religious pluralism. These factors include:

- The end of 18th- and 19th-century, Western colonialism in Africa and Asia
- Firsthand contact between Westerners and other cultures as travel in other countries and cultures accelerated
- The work of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago—in connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893—which accelerated study of the world’s religions
- A decline of Western confidence in its own moral and cultural superiority spurred by two world wars
- A steady expansion of the study of world religions in the curricula of secondary and university education in Europe and North America

In the last third of the 19th century the birth of a new academic discipline, “the science of religion,” appeared. It was dedicated to the study of the history of religion. Known as the History of Religion School, it contributed much to the evolution of religious pluralism. The school rigorously applied the principles of “historicism” to Christianity and other religions. Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) was one of its most distinguished representatives.

- The recent development of Postcolonial Criticism. It places all religions and scriptures under rigorous criticism, with reference to whether or not they have served the cause of colonial oppression and exploitation of subjected cultures and persons, perhaps especially women.

## Mature Religious Pluralism

Ninian Smart identifies the 30 years between 1960-1990 as a watershed in the development of the ideology of religious pluralism. The traditional confidence in Western superiority—religious, cultural, and even technological—faded. Six reasons lie behind the changes that accelerated the emergence of religious pluralism:

*Refer to Resource 2-5 in the Student Guide.*

1. In the West there occurred an accelerated and indigenous growth of interest in Eastern cultures and religions. This was especially true of Buddhism, Hinduism, the Sikhs, the Jains, and modes of Chinese thought and practice influenced by

Confucius. The spread of Eastern religions in the United States and Europe since 1960 is one of the most remarkable phenomena of the modern era. For example, there are presently more than 300 temples in Los Angeles, home to the greatest variety of Buddhists in the world.

The accelerating interest in Eastern religions was noticeably evident in the hippie movement (1960s). Theodore Rozak tells this story in *The Making of a Counter Culture*. A by-product of the Vietnam War was that it contributed to an increased awareness of the religions and cultures of the East.

2. A rapid growth of Islam, and the growth of the Muslim population in the West occurred because of immigration and conversions. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 also attracted greater attention to Islam.
3. The magnificent success of Japanese economics, followed by that of Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. All of this increased Western recognition of Eastern cultures and religions.
4. An explosion of writings that exposed people in the West to other regions, including Islam and the old and new religions of the East. Today, in Europe and North America, scholarly and popularly written books dealing with the world's religions elbow for space on bookstore shelves. Translations of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Tao-Te-Chin*, and the *Koran* are readily available.

The book *Sidhartha*, by Herman Hesse, originally published in German in 1922, has since its publication been widely influential among high school and college students. Described as a mid-century revelation to generations of Western students newly acquainted with Eastern religions, *Sidhartha* parallels the enlightenment of the Buddha. The book is the story of a young Brahmin's quest for the ultimate reality.

5. Although Vatican II (1962-65) did not support the ideology of religious pluralism, it did make place for a positive role to be played by non-Christian religions in what are called "advanced cultures." The *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra aetate)* says:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with

*Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965, Documents of the Second Vatican Council, section 2.*

sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself!

6. Finally, the dissemination of information and globalization of cultures ignited by the Internet have probably contributed to religious pluralism more extensively than anyone can measure. Thanks in large part to the Internet, there is a growing global consciousness regarding democracy, citizen empowerment, freedom of communication, culture, civic participation, gender equity, human rights, civil justice, peace, and general quality of life.

Wadi Haddad refers to the result of this media-enhanced culture as "International culture." It is marked by a free global flow of information and culture. It spawns common concerns, shared values, and enhanced social discernment. The growing international culture is global in nature. It has a virtual identity that is seemingly neutral with reference to traditional identities—state, ethnicity, religion, etc. This media-enhanced culture offers people an opportunity to engage other cultures without leaving their homes.

*Wadi D. Haddad, "Tertiary Education Today: Global Trends, Global Agendas, Global Constraints." Haddad is the president of Knowledge Enterprise, Inc. (USA), [haddad@KnowledgeEnterprise.org](mailto:haddad@KnowledgeEnterprise.org).*

## **Guided Discussion: Pluralism**

(15 minutes)

*Allow for student response and discussion.*

*What are some of the noticeable similarities to and differences between religious pluralism in the Greco-Roman world and our day?*

*In the history of the Church's close relationship with the state, did the Church in any way contribute to the emergence of the ideology of religious pluralism?*

*If we apply the rule of historicism to Buddhism and Taoism, for instance, why should we not apply it to the Christian religion?*

*Does a close alliance between the Church and the state serve the best interests of the Christian faith?*

# Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

## Review

*Call on several students to respond to the question.*

Name a key idea from this lesson.

## Assign Homework

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

Read Resource 2-6.

Read Resource 2-7. Prepare a one-page response paper to this reading giving your reaction—positive and/or negative—and how the ideas of this reading affect you and the church. Bring two copies to class.

Continue working on your interviews as defined in the Syllabus.

*Truesdale, Al. With Cords of Love. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006. .*

Optional Reading: *With Cords of Love* by Al Truesdale, chapter 2.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the motivator.

## Lesson 3

# The Influence of the Modern Era on Religious Pluralism

## Lesson Overview

### Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:15	The Tower of Babel	Small Groups	Homework
0:30	The Influence of the Modern Era on Religious Pluralism	Lecture	Resource 3-1 Resource 3-2
1:05	Student Response	Guided Discussion	
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### Suggested Reading for Instructor

Grenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Blackwell Publishers, 1990.

Lakeland, Paul. *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age (Guides to Theological Inquiry)*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997.

McLaren, Brian D. *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2001.

Middleton, J. Richard and Brian J. Walsh. *Truth is Stranger than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995.

Murphy, Nancy. *Anglo-American Postmodernity: Philosophical Perspective on Science, Religion, and Ethics*. Philadelphia: Westview Press, 1997.

Truesdale, Al. *With Cords of Love*. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006. Chapter 3.

# Lesson Introduction

(15 minutes)

## Accountability

*In pairs have the students share from their journals.*

*Return homework.*

## Orientation

To understand the larger historical, cultural, religious, and philosophical context in which religious pluralism is cast, and in which the gospel is to be proclaimed, we need to observe how the modern era and postmodernity have influenced, and continue to influence, religious pluralism. In this lesson we will look at the influence of the modern era, and in the next lesson the influence of postmodernity.

In *A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two Friends on a Spiritual Journey*, Brian McLaren traces the efforts of "Dan," a Christian minister and pastor, to come to grips with the differences between modernity and postmodernity. Dan is confronting a crisis of faith he neither understands nor knows how to resolve. He admits that he has gotten "sick of being a pastor" and "almost sick of being a Christian." Dan's honesty is refreshing. In the midst of his crisis, Neo Oliver, a high school teacher who holds a Ph.D. in the philosophy of science, becomes Dan's dialogue partner. Neo helps him see that his crisis stems from a conflict between the modern frame of reference in which he is stuck, and a postmodern world to which he should be ministering. Dan, like many of us, discovers the "migration" from one world to another can be demanding and painful. In Dan, McLaren seems to be speaking for himself.

*(San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2001), ix.*

In the next two lessons we will freely use McLaren's digestible and helpful definitions and explanations. Both Dan and Neo will be heard to speak. In this lesson we will use Neo's 10-point description of modernity. In the next lesson we will rely to a large extent upon his description of postmodernity.

Here is a thumbnail guide for comprehending the material in the two lessons. The modern era was built largely upon a confidence in human reason as the most

dependable way to understand the cosmos, religion, history, the mind, morality, philosophy, the political order, and just about everything else humans consider important. Modernity characteristically believed all of human life could be harmoniously organized through the right use of reason. The tools necessary for doing so are within human reach.

Many representatives of the modern spirit either greatly reduced the sphere of importance for religion or were confident that religion has no good future at all. The sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) thought religion can still play a beneficial social role even though its erroneous claims regarding God's reality have been exposed. William James (1843-1910), the American philosopher, thought belief in God is preferable to atheism, not because there is solid reason to believe, but because believing in God makes the world appear more warm and full of meaning. Religious faith is "practical." But Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) was certain religion has no good future. Religion springs from a universal neurosis that can be cured if its "truth" is confronted. And Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-72) thought religion is the fruit of human projection, a projection that began as humankind emerged.

It is important to note that modernity and skepticism regarding religion are not synonymous. Many thinkers and leaders in the modern era have insisted on the fundamental importance of religion and have seen no necessary conflict between modernity and religious faith. Deism was one means by which many modern persons reconciled modernity and religion. For others, orthodox Christian faith and modernity are reconcilable. They view modern science, for example, as a remarkable window for observing the mighty works of God.

Dr. Lowell Hall personifies this spirit. He is a professor of chemistry at Eastern Nazarene College and a research chemist. He once told Dr. Truesdale of the delight he experiences as a scientist when he enters his laboratory and is "privileged to think the thoughts of God behind Him." In *The Faith of a Physicist: Reflections of a Bottom-Up Thinker* (Fortress Press, 1996), Dr. John Polkinghorne, a particle physicist and an Anglican priest, writes eloquently of how his work as a scientist complements his Christian faith. And we may recall that Nikolaus Copernicus (1473-1543), Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), and Johann Kepler (1571-1630), Christians all, hoped their study of the heavens would bring glory to God.

That said, for many persons—especially among leading intellectuals in Europe and North America—the defining tenets of modernity did assume the qualities of an all-embracing “ideology” of “religious” proportions. Theologians Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich never tired of exposing the “ideological” tendencies of the modern experiment. In its “ideological” form, modernity was predominantly hostile toward religion.

For purposes of understanding how some characteristics of modernity contributed to the emergence of religious pluralism, we will focus on modernity in its more comprehensive and “ideological” form. But we will remember that by doing so we are not speaking for all modern thinkers and leaders. Nor by critiquing modernity are we including all it did or did not accomplish.

Some of the things we normally associate with modernity are belief in a continual, “progressive” transformation of society by the disciplined use of “objective” reason—in politics, education, the flowering of the empirical and social sciences, appearance of the theory of biological evolution through adaptation, and its application to other spheres of human life. We also remember global exploration and the expansion of free trade, the industrial revolution and confidence in its promises, the great nationalistic movements toward freedom and democracy, the high tide of colonialism, and the spread of Christianity in its wake.

Much of the world has richly benefited from modernity. Democratic institutions, the sciences, technology, access to education for all children, the beneficial dimensions of the industrial revolution, and the wondrous drugs and medicines that help us overcome formerly lethal diseases are some of the more notable benefits. Some of the fruits of modernity have enhanced the proclamation of the gospel and have provided important tools for studying the Scriptures.

In the Wesleyan tradition we do not exalt reason above Scripture, but we do rely heavily upon a disciplined use of reason for proclaiming the gospel of our Lord. In positive ways, the modern era has contributed to that.

*One of the most remarkable, recent instances of modern technology in the service of the gospel is occurring in Wycliffe International, the famous Bible translation organization. In 1992, Wycliffe produced 25 new translations. This was its highest mark until 2004. But in 2004 Wycliffe started 82 new projects, the highest in Christian history.*

*What made this astonishing acceleration possible? An entrepreneur linguist in Papua New Guinea developed a new computer program called “Adapt It.” The new program helps translate closely-related languages in ways never before possible. Instead of having a translator go through all the exegesis, background, and training needed for a good first draft, the software helps to generate a first draft, thereby saving years in the translation process. The average translation time required for translating the New Testament will now be 13 years instead of 17.*  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/002/28.74.html>

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- understand the characteristics of modernity
- understand why modernity’s trust in reason often fostered a suspicion of religion in all its forms

*organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.*

- understand why many modern thinkers dismissed religion as a retardant to human progress, and thereby relegated it to the margins of life
- understand how modernity could in some ways undercut the claims of any religion to be the “true” one

## Motivator

The following story appeared in the *Washington Times* on December 8, 2002. “Suit Seeks to Allow Wiccan’s Invocation,” written by Mary Shaffrey. Mention of the ACLU in the story is not meant to speak negatively of its role in defending the civil rights of Americans.

The Virginia chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union is suing the Chesterfield County Board of Supervisors for refusing to allow a Wiccan leader to give the invocation at the start of its meeting.

The lawsuit was filed in federal court in Richmond and says the Board of Supervisors is violating the constitutional ban on state-sponsored religion by denying Wiccan priestess Cynthia Simpson the opportunity to offer an invocation.

The lawsuit also says the board’s policy violates the constitutional guarantee of equal protection. “They are supposed to be making laws, not theological judgments,” said the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, which has joined in the suit with the ACLU. “They do not believe Wicca to be a religion like Christianity, but government officials cannot be making these decisions.”

The board regularly opens its meetings with a voluntary invocation by a leader of a Judeo-Christian denomination. Earlier this year, Miss Simpson asked the Board of Supervisors to allow her to give an invocation. She was denied. “Chesterfield’s nonsectarian invocations are traditionally made to a divinity that is consistent with the Judeo-Christian tradition,” wrote Chesterfield County Attorney Steven Micas in a letter to Miss Simpson denying her request.

## Lesson Body

### Small Groups: The Tower of Babel

(15 minutes)

*Divide the class into groups of about 3 each.*

*During this time you might read one or two of the students' journals and give response to their comments.*

*Collect homework papers.*

In your group exchange and read each others' homework papers from the reading of "The Tower of Babel: Modernity Built the Tower—Now Postmodernity Must Face the Challenge of Condemning the 'Unsafe Structure.'" "

Discuss the different responses that may have been made. Challenge each other to support statements and ideas.

### Lecture: The Influence of the Modern Era on Religious Pluralism

(35 minutes)

We have briefly traced pluralism's historical development in the Western world. The influence of two major historical developments needs to be examined. In the next two lessons we will examine the impact of modernity and postmodernity on religious pluralism. Our examination is brief and thus admittedly limited.

- *Some persons believe modernity began with Gutenberg's invention of the printing press that used movable type (1436).*
- *Others say it was Luther's split with Rome (1520).*
- *Still others suggest the end of the Thirty Years' War (1648).*
- *Still others point to the Enlightenment in the 18th century.*
- *Stephen Toulmin thinks modernity was a complex interweave that issued from the humanism of the 16th century and the development of science in the 17th century.*

*Chuck Colson, a leader among Evangelicals in the United States, thinks postmodernity has arrived, has had its day, and may already be passing away. He asks, "Is postmodernism—the philosophy that claims there is no transcendent truth—on life support? It may be premature to sign the death certificate, but there*

Establishing exact dates for the beginning and close of the modern era is impossible because neither the point of its beginning nor its ending is agreed upon. Historical eras emerge and decline. Placing dates on their tombstones is usually arbitrary. In fact, whether or not we should even speak of the "end of the modern era," and if so, what that means, are the subject of intense debate. Some place the beginning of modernity as early as the 16th century, while others place it as late as 1850. Those who think the modern era is now being replaced by a postmodern one place the close of modernity somewhere toward the middle of the 20th century. Brian McLaren says we should become accustomed to speaking of the modern era as "then" and not as "now." "Postmodern" means having experienced modernity, being deeply affected by it, and then in important ways passing beyond.

*are signs postmodernism is losing strength.” From “The Postmodern Crackup,” Christianity Today Daily Newsletter (Dec 2003), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/012/2472.html>)*

*Kenan Osborne disagrees. “There is no doubt that postmodern philosophy has already reshaped the thinking of many people both in the West and, at least indirectly, in other areas of the globe as well . . . postmodern thought will play a major role in the third millennium.” From Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millennium (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 1.*

*Postmodernity has significantly influenced philosophy and theology. But it doesn't stop there. We now speak of postmodern:*

- *Architecture—Aldo Rossi in Italy and Robert Venturi in America. Venturi, among others, judged modern architecture to have degenerated into an anonymous product, epitomized by monotonous glass skyscrapers and based on an efficiency of construction fostered by capitalist speculation.*
- *Art—Talk Show Addicts by Roger Brown and Untitled by Jon Swihart*
- *Magazines—e-journals or e-zines*
- *Music—which favors eclecticism in form and musical genre, and often combines characteristics from different genres, or employs jump-cut sectionalization*
- *Aesthetics*

*A stream of postmodern movies reveal the “postmodern turn” in how postmoderns see themselves, others, and the world. The “Matrix” series well illustrates the hyper-reality dimension of postmodern movie making. See Bryan P. Stone, Faith and Film: Theological Themes at the Cinema (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000).*

## **A Profile of Modernity**

Keeping in mind that modernity and religious skepticism are not synonymous, let's observe the characteristics of modernity that contributed to the growth of religious pluralism as we now know it.

*Refer to Resource 3-1 in the Student Guide.*

Modernity is often spoken of as “the Enlightenment Project,” so named by philosopher Jurgen Habermas (1929-). It was the human intellectual quest to unlock the secrets of the universe in order to master nature for human benefit and to create a better world.

*McLaren. A New Kind of Christian, 16-19.*

In Neo Oliver’s conversations with pastor Dan, he outlines 10 identifying characteristics of the modern era. Let’s use Neo’s outline as a guide. Notice the spirit of confidence, optimism, and universality that characterizes modernity. The characteristics of modernity as Neo sees them are:

1. **Conquest and control.** This included bringing the entire world under the sway of Western European philosophy, culture, languages, economics, religion, and technology. Nature was subdued. Native peoples and their cultures were conquered. And a thousand problems “from bad breath to syphilis” were overcome. Conquest also demands control. Moderns committed themselves to controlling people, results, risks, economies, experiments, profit margins, variables, nature, and even the weather.
2. **The age of the machine.** Mechanization has been the unspoken goal of the modern world, including a mechanized world and people who are themselves viewed as autonomous machines. The universe is intelligible and reason can comprehend it.
3. **An age of analysis.** If the universe and its occupants are intelligible, and if the sciences provide the master screwdriver for taking it apart, then analysis is the ultimate form of thought. Through ever more precise analysis, the universe and its contents become ever more knowable, and in many cases controllable. For many, this entailed an ever-diminishing role for religion, until finally religion could be expected to play no role at all, for “man came of age.” Religion would contribute nothing to what is really worth knowing. Forms of thought—religion, intuition, systems thinking—other than that based strictly on analytic reason could, by many, be judged inferior and disposable.
4. **An age of secular science.** We are abundantly familiar with how a “confidence” in the empirical sciences—and the social sciences to a somewhat lesser extent—has dominated the modern era. As the sciences matured they became more and more secular. That is, they had less and less reason to appeal to any source beyond the observable, empirical world. “Mystery” could be unpacked by

*Ibid.*, 17.

methodical analysis and experimentation. The power of secular science eventually rose above ecclesiastical and religious power. "It's no wonder that religion was scurrying in retreat in the modern era. . . . Perhaps religion could survive in the hidden corners of the private [and subjective] sector, but in the public sector it was [largely] seen . . . as a dirty embarrassment, unsanitary, unwelcome, gauche."

5. **An age that aspired to absolute objectivity.** A hallmark of modernity was belief in the powers and objectivity of reason. Those like Immanuel Kant who placed themselves under reason's tutelage could confidently expect to escape the enslaving subjectivity of religion, tradition, prejudice, fear, superstition, and guilt the Church had fostered. Objective reason could achieve absolute certainty about the universe, morality, the organization of human affairs, economics, the sources of religion, and so forth.

What was as yet not known and worth knowing was ultimately knowable. Ignorance could be replaced by information, mystery with comprehension, and subjective religious beliefs with objective truth. Confidence in the objectivity of reason and the fruits it could bear applied to all persons everywhere. The whole world should be brought under the governance of objective reason. We can easily anticipate the exalted "messianic" quality of this confidence.

Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), John Stuart Mill (1806-73), and John Dewey (1859-1952) sought to establish an objective and compelling morality based on reason, unhitched from religion.

6. **A critical age.** Armed with the power of "objectivity" and set free from enslaving subjectivities, moderns could submit everything to critical examination and could thereby debunk every truth claim, religion, scripture, tradition, and culture that did not pass the test of reason. One of the chief characteristics of this process is known as "reductionism," which simply reduces everything to "nothing but" observable causes and effects. For example, a religious conversion experience should be explained in terms of psychology, emotions, childhood influences, and so forth. No transcendent source is needed.

The process described here is often spoken of as “the secularization of the West,” a process that is now very far advanced in Europe, except that Europe is now being flooded with committed Muslims, and to a lesser extent, adherents of other religions. Less and less is religion or the sacred needed for understanding, organizing, and securing human existence. In its extreme form, “secularization” can, but need not, become “secularism,” an ideology that actively declares “the death of God” and seeks to eliminate all vestiges of religion from the public square.

7. **An age of the modern nation-states and organization.** Since the decline of the Middle Ages, and under significant influence from the Protestant Reformation, the modern era has been marked by the organization of nation-states. The colonial powers even created nation-states in parts of the world—Africa and the Middle East—where once there were only tribes. Thanks in large part to trust in reason, the sciences that showed the universe to be orderly, and the industrial revolution, the modern era was marked by ever-increasing efforts to organize that which was believed to be disorderly, including other cultures.

A definition of modernity that fits into Neo’s seventh characteristic sees it as the attempt to bring rational management to life in all its dimensions, so as to improve human existence through science, reason, and technology.

8. **An age of individualism.** For reasons that would require a book to explain, the modern era moved from a focus on “we” to a focus on “I.” This is sometimes referred to as modernity’s “subjective turn.” The “individual” and his or her subjectivity became more conceptually prominent and interesting than the “community,” or social solidarity. Ironically, increasing fragmentation and increasing organization traveled together. Communities “disintegrated and left their smallest constituent parts—individuals—disconnected and hanging in midair.”

*Ibid.*, 18.

9. **An age of Protestantism and institutional religion.** Where religion thrived most in the modern era it did so in its most institutional forms and in its most Protestant forms. Oddly enough, the modern era was marked by an explosion of Christian—Protestant and Roman Catholic—missions. There is no denying that missionary activity often went hand-in-hand with, and

See R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford Press, 2002).

supported, colonialism. The “advance” of Christianity was often used to justify the subjugation of non-Christian cultures.

10. **An age of consumerism.** All the following combined to produce an age of consumerism: capitalism (a market economy and advertising), the industrial revolution, colonialism and exploration, mechanized transportation and farming, and the development of modern monetary and banking systems.

Eventually, persons came to be defined and valued largely by gratification: by what the market told them they needed, by the goods they could procure, and by the ease and immediacy of acquisition. Interestingly, in *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), Herbert Marcuse charged that the consumer society had actually become a *totalitarian* society. This seems like a strange indictment because we normally associate consumerism with “freedom.” But, said Marcuse, our consumer society has become *totalitarian* in that technology, consumerism, media, language, the state, culture, and ideology are used as instruments of social control and domination. Listening to how the “science” of advertising is used to manipulate our desires, buying habits, sense of social status, and even to define what it means to be “person,” may lead us to conclude that Marcuse’s analysis isn’t so far-fetched at all.

## Modernity’s Contributions to the Emergence of Religious Pluralism

Now let’s explore the bearing modernity has had on the emergence of religious pluralism. We have already begun to anticipate some of the consequences.

Refer to Resource 3-2 in the Student Guide.

1. In the centers of greatest philosophical, political, economic, cultural, scientific, and intellectual power, religion in all its forms was more and more reduced to the “inconsequential” margins of human life. For modernity as described in most of Neo’s 10 characteristics, religion simply could not play an important public role. Many modern persons believed that given the history of Christianity in Western Europe since the 4th century, the Christian religion was a lurking danger to human well-being. It represented a tyranny—particularly in the form of clerical privilege in France—from which humankind

needed to be set free. We must remember that the wars of religion (1562 until the Edict of Nantes in 1598) that had devastated a generation were lodged in Europe's recent memory.

2. Many moderns believed the truth about all religions, their founders, their *cultus*, and their scriptures had been exposed through the use of the newly acquired tools of historical analysis. Their origin rises no higher than history itself. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) was paraphrased as saying, "The truth is that there is no one here but us, and that's good." The "transcendent" authority of religion as such was thereby undercut.
3. Wherever this conclusion holds, the power of any religion to claim it is the "true" religion above all others has been broken. In an effort to save a place for religion, one may argue one religion is more "useful" for human well-being than another. But even so, its importance is strictly utilitarian. One may even argue one religion is better suited to a particular culture than is another. Still, its significance is finally utilitarian. Even if in the afterlife we were to discover that one religion is true over all the others, we have absolutely no way of deciding this from within the limitations of history.

The best course of action for members of each religion is to believe firmly in his or her own faith, but also to place the well-being of the state above all sectarian strife. Members of a religion can best demonstrate their beliefs through honesty, piety, self-discipline, and tolerant respect for others.

The surest way to prove the falsehood of one's own religion is to act arrogantly and oppressively toward other religions, or to try to proselytize persons against their own good consciences. Authentic piety and tolerance present the surest paths to peace and admirable religious practice. This was the position the philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81) presented in the dramatic poem, "Nathan the Wise."

In "the story of the three rings," Nathan counsels members of the various religions to compete with each other in generosity. Let virtue and mild humility, hearty forbearance, and benevolence mark one.

4. Characteristically, then, to the extent religion has any public role at all, it should produce good citizens who can contribute to the peace of the realm. Otherwise, religion belongs in the private and subjective domain. It simply has no credentials in realms that rely upon modern criteria for knowledge and importance. If they must, let the religions nourish their “narratives,” but by all means let them do it in private.
5. This being true, the public square is certainly no place for religions to debate their superiority. Let them live humbly in each other’s presence. There are far greater goods to be achieved in the human community than settling religious squabbles. The tools for human harmony and betterment lie largely with modernity. At best, religion can play no more than a supporting role.

*“The person who marries the spirit of the age is sure to be a widow or widower in the next.” Quoted in McLaren, A New Kind of Christian, 22.*

We may wonder how such dominant ideas could ever fall into serious disfavor. But that is exactly what has happened. In the next lesson we will turn to a “crisis of modernity” and to postmodernity. We will also explore its importance for religious pluralism.

## **Guided Discussion: Student Response**

(20 minutes)

*Allow for student response.*

*Challenge students to support statements that they make.*

*What are the identifying characteristics of modernity you believe to have been most prominent and influential during the modern era?*

*Which are the most positive?*

*Which ones have most affected you?*

*Which ones have most affected our church?*

*What might you anticipate to be a source of crisis for modernity that will set the stage for postmodernity?*

## Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

### Review

*Do you have any questions or comments concerning this lesson?*

### Assign Homework

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

Read Resource 3-3. Write a one-page response paper giving your reaction—positive and/or negative—and how the ideas of this reading affect you and the church.

Continue working on your interviews as defined in the Syllabus.

*Truesdale, Al. With Cords of Love. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006.*

Optional Reading: *With Cords of Love* by Al Truesdale, chapter 3.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

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## *Lesson 4*

# The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism

## *Lesson Overview*

### **Schedule**

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	The Tower of Babel	Small Groups	Homework
0:25	The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism	Lecture	Resources 4-1—4-4
1:10	Student Response	Guided Discussion	
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### **Suggested Reading for Instructor**

Same as Lesson 3.

# Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

## Accountability

*Call on one or two students to share from their journals.*

*Return homework.*

## Orientation

In this lesson we will discuss some of the characteristics of postmodernity as they directly bear on religious pluralism and announcing the gospel of God.

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.*

- By the end of this lesson, participants should
- understand some of the reasons we speak of “postmodernity”
  - understand and be able to discuss the “crisis of modernity” that gave rise to postmodernity
  - understand the main characteristics of postmodernity that relate to religious pluralism
  - understand why respect for the many religious narratives is so important in a postmodern world.
  - understand why “postmodernity” is more favorable to the role of religion in human life than was “modernity”
  - begin to see how Wesleyan theology is well positioned for Christian mission and service in a postmodern age

## Motivator

*Quoted in J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, Truth Is Stranger than It Used to Be (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 18-19.*

Prince Albert of England organized the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1851 in Hyde Park. His public speech on the opening day voiced the modern confidence in human progress through the use of reason. “Nobody who has paid any attention to the peculiar features of our present era will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition, which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end to which indeed all history points—the realization of the unity of mankind.” Prince Albert’s words identified the achievements of the 19th century as the zenith of human reason and progress.

## Lesson Body

### Small Groups: The Tower of Babel

(15 minutes)

*Divide the class into groups of two.*

*During this time you might read one or two of the students' journals and give response to their comments.*

*Collect homework papers.*

In your group exchange and read each others' homework paper from the reading of "The Tower of Babel: Modernity Built the Tower—Now Postmodernity Must Face the Challenge of Condemning the 'Unsafe Structure.'" "

Discuss the different responses that may have been made. Challenge each other to support their statements and ideas.

### Lecture: The Influence of Postmodernity on Religious Pluralism

(45 minutes)

#### Introduction

One of the most intriguing features of the study of history is the confluence of factors that either give birth to an era or compose its obituary. As the pieces of a new era fall into place, the foundations of the old one begin to shake. What was once held to be so obvious and permanent now causes persons to ask, "How could they ever have believed that?" Often, the question is being asked long before its full importance is confronted. Some day, if the pattern persists, someone will ask the same question of our own era.

Many people believe we are now passing from one major historical era to another, from modernity to postmodernity. Others disagree, saying only we are just observing major adjustments in modernity. The disagreement is not surprising. In the early dawn of a new day two persons looking at the same object will often disagree over its identity. In this section we have no interest in debating whether or not we should call our current situation "postmodern." At least for convenience sake, we will use the language. This much is certain: the features usually associated with postmodernity are noticeably different from the features of modernity we observed in the previous lesson. In noticeable ways they constitute a revolt against some of modernity's central tenets.

An era does not just simply evaporate, immediately to be replaced by another. In important ways it continues

[http://www.alaska.net/~clund/e\\_d\\_jublonskopf/Flatearthsociety.htm](http://www.alaska.net/~clund/e_d_jublonskopf/Flatearthsociety.htm)

*Use your own illustration that reflects you.*

to influence and shape its successor. In fact, at their beginnings and endings eras overlap. The new age may in fact be budding even as the old one appears to be humming along on all cylinders. It is also the case that eras can exist parallel to each other, even in the same nation; i.e., a population doesn't move *en masse* from one era to another. Even today there exists a "Flat Earth Society" which invites us to join. We should also note that in much of the media and secular higher education, a bias against religion that is more "modern" than "postmodern" still exists.

Those of us who were born and educated in the atmosphere of modernity are more noticeably shaped by the experience than are today's university students. The truth is that when discussing postmodernity, some of us sound more as though we are visiting someone else's home than that we are describing a house in which we live. This is probably inevitable. I did not live through the Great Depression. But a friend of mine did. The experience has shaped his spending habits in ways that seem strange to me.

Dr. Frank Moore, the vice president for academic affairs at MidAmerica Nazarene University, can spend hours describing the postmodern characteristics of his students, characteristics in some ways foreign to his own way of thinking. Maybe many of us will identify with Brian McLaren's description of himself as one who is "migrating." We can also agree with his insistence that all of us who want to serve the gospel of Jesus Christ—those who already live in the house of postmodernity, and those who are still trying to find the door—have a responsibility to be informed and conversant.

A full-scale discussion of postmodernity is certainly beyond the range of this lesson. The books in the bibliography can provide a much broader introduction. In this lesson we will have to limit discussion to the features of postmodernity that bear directly on religious pluralism.

Dr. Truesdale writes, "Permit me to state my own conviction with reference to postmodernity. I believe the postmodern era will be more hospitable to religion than was modernity. This is a time ripe with opportunity, not a time for lamenting the passing of an era. We should be characterized by eagerness and wide-eyed anticipation over what the Holy Spirit is going to do through the Church of our Lord. Many of modernity's tenets that counted against religion are now being radically challenged, and are being replaced

by an openness much more conducive to religion. This should definitely not be taken to mean that postmodernity invites a reintroduction of politically assured Christian dominance. It does not, nor should it! The Christian faith is in its strongest position when it has no political or social privileges above any other faith."

"How much space does the Church need?" asked Dietrich Bonhoeffer as he was being trailed by the Nazis. "Only as much space as it takes to bear witness to the gospel of God."

The openness to religion we will describe here is tailor-made for the Wesleyan tradition. That tradition trusts the success of the gospel wholly to the persuasive work of the Holy Ghost, and not at all to either human or divine coercion, whether covert or overt. Understanding both the postmodern openness and how the Wesleyan tradition intersects with it will be our goal throughout this module. The apostle Paul's stated versatility in the service of the gospel can serve as our model (1 Cor 9:19-23).

*Refer to Resource 4-1 in the Student Guide.*

*Osborne, Christian Sacraments, 2.*

*Suggestions regarding the beginning of postmodernity have also been forthcoming. In A Study of History, Arnold Toynbee said the modern historical period ended somewhere between 1850 and 1918. Others suggest 1966, when Robert Venturi published his architectural manifesto. Or maybe postmodern began on July 15, 1972, when a high-rise residential structure for the poor was demolished in St. Louis, on the grounds that it was uninhabitable. The point is that rather than having to decide which claim is the correct one, we should see each suggestion as but an important marker in the emergence of postmodernity.*

## **A Definition?**

It would be good if we could begin with a universally agreed-upon definition of postmodernity. For numerous reasons, no such definition exists. Kenan Osborne observes, "'Postmodern' remains a fairly undefined word. It seems that Federico de Osnis first used it in a Spanish essay around 1934." One reason for the absence of a universally agreed-upon definition is that the contours of postmodernity are still emerging. It is probably still in its infancy. Another reason is that many reject the notion that we in the West have entered a new era that deserves the name "postmodern." It would be more correct, they say, to speak of "hyper-modernity."

In the previous lesson we met Neo, pastor Dan's dialogue partner, or better yet his tutor, who helps him understand the postmodern world. We will rely on Neo in this lesson, much as we did in Lesson 3. Neo says one good way to begin to understand postmodernity is to write the word "post" in front of each of the 10 characteristics of modernity identified in Lesson 3. Neo says the early stages of an era are marked by stating what was wrong with the previous one. It takes time for a new vision to be proposed. Given the character of postmodernity as it appears so far, the notion of a monolithic vision or philosophy should not be expected.

Attaching such an expectation to postmodernity would be self-contradictory. Its profile is far more pluralistic.

### **Born in Crisis**

Postmodernity was born because of *severe crises* in modernity that broke out along broad fronts. This began to occur as early as the late 18th- and early 19th-century Romantic Movement, which revolted against what romanticists saw as the Enlightenment's overemphasis on reason. Simply put, postmoderns believe modernity claimed entirely too much for itself—for reason, for the limits of knowledge and what is worth knowing, for the objectivity of reason, for the rational organization of society, the autonomous self, and so forth. Postmodernists say modernity claimed to “know” far more than it could support, and it artificially limited what we can and should know. Simply stated, the charge is that modernity grossly “overreached,” and its overreach has finally caught up with it.

Paul Tillich said “reason” should have claimed occupancy for only one room in the house of knowledge and meaning, and should have left space for other “residents.” Religion—the wisdom of traditional cultures, emotions, aesthetics, and communal knowledge—should have had plenty of living space as well. But modernity, in what we earlier referred to as its “ideological” expression, barged in, pitched out the other occupants, and tried to occupy the house all by itself. As might have been expected, eventually a revolt occurred. Let’s use Brian McLaren and others to look at some of the features of this revolt, particularly as it affects religious pluralism.

A reminder: postmodernity is more diverse and more complex than this brief discussion reveals.

### **Sources of the “Crisis” in Modernity**

The “crises” that jolted modernity have many sources. One was the growing recognition of humankind’s ability to abuse the very “reason” that was supposed to have been an impartial liberator. For example, while the use of reason in the industrial revolution yielded many remarkable results, its success often came at the expense of workers—men, women, and children—who were reduced to the level of expendable commodities. The price of success was often sprawling cities that bred poverty, robber barons who gathered great wealth and power with disregard for justice and community, a polluted atmosphere, polluted rivers and

*Refer to Resource 4-2 in the Student Guide.*

drinking water, ravaged natural resources, and a contemptuous exploitation of non-Western cultures.

Another source of the crisis was the occurrence of two world wars in half a century, which shook confidence in reason and progress. "Reason" turned out to be not nearly so objective as its champions had claimed, nor could it protect itself against those who reason. The two wars revealed just how grotesquely reason can be placed in the service of evil, used to destroy social institutions, and crush the human spirit. The world watched as reason was pressed to develop machines for killing combatants and civilians in magnitudes never before witnessed. The wars reduced Europe—the jewel of the Enlightenment—to mechanized savagery and destruction. Rather than enlightened reason and a secular salvation ruling the world, nations sought their own colonial and militaristic interests, disregarding the well-being of other and weaker states. The naked reality stands: no dimension of the human spirit is immune to corruption and the ravages of original sin. Back in 1949, in his famous novel, *1984*, George Orwell made this point in secular language.

The sciences were supposed to be "objective," free of subjectivity, and our pioneer guide to the promised land. We now know that while they can be enormously beneficial, the sciences can just as easily be pressed into the hire of greed, national interests, and Wall Street. Original sin is barred by no human door.

"Objective reason" as touted by the Enlightenment proved to be "a myth." History and postmodern thinkers have exploded it. "Objectivity" closely examined will usually, if not always, reveal the "subjectivity" of the person or culture doing the reasoning.

Many other factors we can't explore here contributed to the crisis in modernity and to the emergence of postmodernity. In the sciences themselves, Einstein's theory of relativity, and subsequent developments in physics, shook the mechanistic worldview set forth by Newtonian physics. Other contributors we could consider are the end of European colonialism; the assertion of the values of non-Western cultures; developments in the nature of language and its relationship to human meaning; the accelerated attractiveness of Eastern religions for Westerners; and revisions of modernity's understanding of the self. Suspicions regarding modernity's hallmark claims emerged from numerous quarters: psychology,

religion, the cinema, philosophy, art, architecture, music, etc.

## Characteristics of Postmodernity as They Affect Religious Pluralism

Neo says it is possible to describe the broad social characteristics of postmodernity without having to go too deeply into postmodern philosophy. We will follow his lead. The books suggested for the instructor at the beginning of Lesson 3 can provide an introduction to postmodern philosophy. In this lesson we will draw upon the substance of postmodernity without trying to wade through the names and thought of postmodern thinkers.

Among the numerous characteristics of postmodernity, let's discuss three that bear most directly on religious pluralism. Then we will examine four implications.

Refer to Resource 4-3 in the Student Guide.

1. The first thing that marks postmodernity is a resurgence of religion, often in novel or "unconventional" forms. Whether the resurgence of religion hastened the collapse of modernity, or whether the latter opened the door for a "return of the sacred," Pastor Dan says the religious resurgence currently brewing is often unconventional and at times even irreverent. For instance, he describes a scene in which both a crucifix and a Native American dream catcher hung from a car's rearview mirror. Pastor Dan suggests that although the driver respects Christianity, he or she finds in Native American religion something he or she believes to be lacking in Christianity.

McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*, 25.

Much of the resurgence of religion is occurring outside the established religious institutions. We are also witnessing a shift of the center of Christian growth and influence from the northern hemisphere to the global south—what is sometimes called "the two-third world." Philip Jenkins tells this story in *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Christianity as a whole is both growing and mutating in ways observers in the West tend to miss. In *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Pub., 2003), David Aikman chronicles the astonishing growth of the Christian faith in China.

*"In the global South—the areas that we often think of primarily as the Third World—huge and growing Christian populations—currently 480 million in Latin America, 360 million in Africa, and 313 million in Asia, compared with 260 million in North America—now make up what the Catholic scholar Walbert Buhlmann has called the Third Church, a form of Christianity as distinct as Protestantism or Orthodoxy, and one that is likely to become dominant in the faith. The revolution taking place in Africa,*

In recent decades the world has also witnessed a

*Asia, and Latin America is far more sweeping in its implications than any current shifts in North American religion, whether Catholic or Protestant," Phillip Jenkins, The Atlantic Monthly, 2002.*

wave of fundamentalism within the established faiths. These include Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist fundamentalism.

According to modern thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx the current resurgence of religion was not supposed to have occurred. They fully expected that as humankind more and more followed the contours of reason—in Marx's case the inevitability of history—religion would become nothing more than a museum piece, archived in the annals of history.

As things have turned out, modernity greatly overstated its own agenda, and greatly understated the richness of the human spirit.

So, postmodernity, unlike the secular, "closed world" the "ideology" of modernity described, is marked by a resurgent openness to the sacred, a fact certainly not been lost on the Western press, as witnessed by the numerous cover articles in *Time*, *Newsweek*, etc. We should be quick to note that openness to the sacred isn't limited to any single religion or any narrow definition of the sacred. It simply means what has come storming back is a persistent belief in and sensitivity to transcendent reality, and to a wholeness of the human spirit, which modernity failed to recognize and certainly did not successfully marginalize.

2. A second feature of postmodernity that intersects with religious pluralism is its dismissal of the notion of complete objectivity. Earlier we said this modern dogma is now referred to as the "myth of objectivity." Nothing contributed more to the explosion of this myth than watching moderns reason. Try as they might, their own subjectivity kept peeking through their "objectivity."

For example, Sigmund Freud's method of psychoanalysis was supposed to have been structured on pure objectivity. But in recent years a stack of writing has accumulated that reveals the numerous ways in which Freud's experiments and conclusions were heavily influenced by his own subjectivity, his gender, his social status, and his choice of persons for research. The November 29, 1993, cover story of *Time* asks, "Is Freud dead?" Sometimes "the myth of objectivity" could become oppressive, as when European colonial powers, in the name of "knowing what reason dictates," ran roughshod over non-Western cultures.

Neo describes the situation in this way: the threshold of postmodernity has been crossed the moment we realize just how relative was the modern viewpoint. It is like a conversion, he says. "You begin to see that what seemed like pure, objective certainty really depends heavily on a subjective preference."

The old paradigm supported the notion that from one superior perspective (the modern western perspective) we can construct a story of human life—what people ought to believe, how they ought to live, and how their cultures should be organized—that would be universally valid. Sometimes this notion is referred to as a "metanarrative," an overarching story that is supposed to be the story for all persons.

Even though many modern thinkers dismissed the notion of "religious truth," they replaced it with another "truth," a modern vision of how human life should be understood, organized, and lived. Modernity, in what we earlier called its "ideological form," claimed to "know," and to know "absolutely" based on its defining convictions. Even though what could and should be known was not based on traditional religion, as we have seen, it did in many instances assume "religious"—or metaphysical—proportions. Reservation and humility were hardly its leading edge. As Neo notes, many modern folk tended "to relativize the viewpoints of others against the unquestioned superiority of their own modern viewpoint." The modern ideology constituted a grand, universally applicable story, a "metanarrative."

*McLaren, 35.*

That is exactly what postmodernity has set ablaze, or as is often heard, has "deconstructed." This move has happened in part because of revisions in physics (theories of relativity, quantum mechanics, chaos theory, and cosmology), the idea of the Big Bang, and an expanding universe. Another contributor is the break-up of European colonialism and the assertion of indigenous voices and cultures on the world scene.

Also spurring an explosion of the myth of objectivity and the emergence of postmodernity has been a growing change in our understanding of "knowledge." In place of our confidence in "objectivity" has come a recognition that "knowing" is inescapably "located." It indelibly bears the marks of the societies and eras in which we live. It

*Ibid.*

is affected by our gender, nationality, class, education, religion, and a host of other "located" factors. One's subjective posture significantly affects what one sees and "knows" objectively. Those persons or communities who think they have escaped their "locations" need only have their "knowledge" scrutinized by persons or communities who come from other "locations." They will soon "deconstruct" the notion of knowledge that transcends subjectivity. As Neo puts it, "We view from a point."

So, by postmodern standards, instead of one universal "metanarrative," the world is in fact alive with many narratives that form communities and persons, thus providing the pictures of meaning that animate them.

According to the postmodern mood, this is true of the many expressions of religion that populate our world. Those who believe they have access to "one" religious narrative all persons ought to own, and according to which they should live, suffer from an illusion that can, if pressed, visit oppression and exploitation on others. Even a modest acquaintance with popular culture and the media is sufficient to reveal this conviction. Religions? Yes. One religion? No! Many paths? Yes. One path for all? No!

Quoted by Alan Wolfe. *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 173.

This spirit is revealed in the statement of a teacher in Queens, NY, who happens to be a Jew: "My way is not right or wrong, it's just my way."

3. The third feature of postmodernity that has implications for religious pluralism is its emphasis upon holism and community. By contrast, modernity was marked by segmentation and reductionism. Personhood tilted toward one dimension: reason and rational organization. It stressed the isolated, subjective ego in the form of raw individualism. And it tended to separate the self from the world of nature. Way back in the 17th century Rene Descartes said we are composed of two unrelated substances: a thinking substance and an extended or material substance, the thinking substance being the most real and important part of the self, often seeing nature as a commodity to be exploited, transformed, and turned into profit.

Postmodernity, by contrast, views persons in holistic terms, as constituted by their relation to other persons, communities, themselves, and the environment. Persons aren't knowable apart from

this. Any perception of personhood that continues to rely upon the “rugged and autonomous” self is viewed as poverty-stricken. All dimensions of the human spirit such as our emotions, aesthetics, labor, reason, the sacred, our interaction with nature, and so forth, must thrive in harmonious complementarity.

*Refer to Resource 4-4 in the Student Guide.*

## **Postmodern Implications for Religious Pluralism**

Already the implications for religious pluralism that grow out of postmodernity have probably begun to surface. Let’s make them explicit.

1. The first lesson is that one must simply come to grips with the postmodern assessment of the many religious stories or narratives in the world. All of them, including Christianity, are seen as adequate, legitimate, and autonomous accounts of reality that form communities and provide meaning for their members. According to the postmodern assessment, absolutely no basis exists by which one narrative might assess and judge another, unless of course a religion is by nature disrespectful and destructive of persons and other narratives.

The conclusion is that only uninformed persons at this juncture in history would be so crude as to boast that their religion “ought” to be the narrative for all persons everywhere. Informed persons know narratives depend for their meaning and conviction upon the communities in which they are willingly nourished. An informed person would not be so foolish as to try to impose one religious narrative upon another, or to use proselytism to replace one narrative with another. Instead, he or she would be ruled by a commitment to respect the integrity of all religious narratives.

Alan Wolfe quotes a Queens, New York, salesman who is Jewish. Speaking of his own Jewish observances, the salesman said, “I don’t have any problem with what anybody does, as long as they don’t tell me what I have to do. So if you want to be involved in something that’s very dear to you, that’s fine, but don’t sit there and tell me about something that is clearly an option in life, that I have to be doing it, and I should be doing it.”

*Wolfe, Transformation of American Religion, 173.*

Neo says this assessment of religion rules out all notions of conquest, rational coercion, intimidating

*McLaren, New Kind of Christian, 62.*

sales pitches, and imposing crusades. The Holy Spirit is the only one who might persuade a person joyously to join the dance of God's grace as manifest in Christ. Admitting to ourselves and others the many ways in which we Christians—Christianity—have failed on this score would be a good place to begin.

*Ibid., 140.*

It would also be helpful to confront the ways in which we have permitted the Christian faith to become ensnarled in the political, economic, and cultural agendas of one era or nation. Have we not at times tended to trust the success of the gospel upon the success of the old order that is passing away? As Neo reminds us through the voice of a young woman, "Christianity doesn't own God."

2. In Neo Oliver's conversations with pastor Dan, he telegraphs one implication of postmodernity for religious pluralism Wesleyans should welcome. It conforms to our understanding of how the grace of God works, and to our emphasis upon the witness of a transformed life. Neo tells pastor Dan:

*Ibid., 61.*

When it comes to other religions, the challenge in modernity was to prove that we're right and they're wrong. But I think we have a different challenge in postmodernity. The question isn't so much whether we're right but whether we're good. And it strikes me that goodness, not just rightness, is what Jesus said the real issue was—you know, good trees produce good fruit, that sort of thing. If we Christians would take all the energy we put into proving we're right and others are wrong, and invested that energy in pursuing and doing good, somehow I think that more people would believe we are right."

*Ibid., 62.*

Dan doesn't immediately get the whole picture. So Neo adds, "Instead of saying, 'Hey, they're wrong and we're right, so follow us,' I think we [should] say, 'Here's what I've found. Here's what I've experienced. Here's what makes sense to me. I'll be glad to share it with you, if you're interested.'"

Neo doesn't mean a disciplined use of reason in the service of the Holy Spirit should just be pitched out.

3. A third implication is that the various narratives must listen to each other. This strikes some Christians as a betrayal of the gospel. "Why listen when you already have the truth?" So this third implication needs to be stated and considered

carefully. Neo tells of a conversation with a Jew who was raised in a predominantly Christian community. The man had concluded that Christianity is, on the whole, a force for evil in the world. His only contact with Christians when he was growing up was when they, hoping to convert him, would tell him he was “going to hell.” Other than that, he had been largely forgotten and excluded.

How did Neo respond to the man? He listened, and then later helped the man carry his bags to a waiting ferry. Dan understood what a wise Wesleyan should know: often, silence is the best service we can render to the gospel.

Why listen? We listen to hear, to hear the meaning other’s religious narrative offers them and their culture, to hear how the gracious God may already be active far beyond our expectations and limitations, and not as a clever device for tricking persons into uninvited proselytism.

Neo concludes, “It’s pathetic for some ignorant preacher to mock the Buddha and Muhammad—neither of whom he has ever seriously studied, much less understood—as if he’s smarter, wiser, and better just because he believes in Jesus.”

*Ibid.*, 65.

4. A fourth implication derives from the postmodern marker known as holism. An adequate appreciation for the various religions must include the whole context from within which they view communities, persons, and nature in relationship to the sacred. Trying to understand a religion simply by using Western or even traditional Christian categories will predictably lead to misunderstanding and misrepresentation. It certainly will not advance real communication.

*Neo tells of one of his students, a Christian, who was looking forward to swimming with dolphins in a park during her vacation in Mexico. Neo asks, “Why will swimming with dolphins be such a meaningful and unforgettable experience for Sherri?” He answers, “Beyond science . . . , I think it will be a spiritual thing for her. It’s part of the reconnection that is at the heart of true religion: we reconnect with God, with our own soul, with our neighbor, and with all God’s creatures—brother sun, sister moon, and brother dolphin too” (119).*

*Ibid.*, 73.

Neo says Christians must not miss the fact that as a result of the influence of modernity on western Christianity, many of us have lost a holistic understanding of life. We tend to be reductionistic, reflecting much of the modern spirit even though we might not intend to do so. Neo thinks if Christians want to follow Jesus, they will have to see Him as a revolutionary who brings holistic reconciliation: a reconnection with God, with others, with ourselves, and with our environment. Jesus was against religion “that comes diced and preprocessed and shrink-wrapped like ground beef.”

If all this is true, we should not expect new Christians in China or Afghanistan, for instance, to be stripped of their culture in order to become Christian. And we certainly should not expect them to identify “Christian” with “Western.” From the days of the Early Church, Christians have legitimately utilized aspects of their own cultures to embody their faith and witness. Sometimes some of us so closely identify “Christian” with “Western” that we forget this.

## Conclusion

In *A New Kind of Christian*, pastor Dan is eventually able to laugh at how closely he had identified the gospel with the era and culture in which he was reared and educated. But it didn’t come easily. Eventually, he came to see that in the highly pluralistic, postmodern context in which we live, the Holy Spirit has set the stage for faithful and fruitful witness to the gospel for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear. I am convinced that if we in the Wesleyan tradition will perceptively read the signs of the times, we can be effective bearers from within our tradition of the Good News in the Lord’s vineyard. We should greet postmodernity as a grand opportunity and not as a threat.

## Guided Discussion: Student Response

(15 minutes)

*Allow for response and discussion.*

*Challenge the students to support their ideas and statements.*

*What is the “crisis” of modernity?*

*What are the identifying marks of postmodernity you have observed in the media, film, fiction, politics, social values?*

*What might identify whether or not there is a greater “openness to the sacred” in postmodernity than there was in modernity?*

## *Lesson Close*

(5 minutes)

### **Review**

*Call on several students to respond.*

*What would you identify—from this lesson—as the most significant idea that will impact your ministry?*

### **Assign Homework**

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

Read Resource 4-5. Write a one- to two-page response paper giving your reaction—positive and/or negative—and how the ideas of this reading affect you and the church.

Continue working on your interviews as defined in the Syllabus.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

## Lesson 5

# Responses to Religious Pluralism among Christians

## Lesson Overview

### Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	A New, Religious America	Small Groups	Homework
0:30	Responses to Religious Pluralism among Christians	Lecture	Resources 5-1—5-4
1:10	Student Response	Guided Discussion	
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### Suggested Reading for Instructor

Gillis, Chester. *Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology*. Louvain: Peeters Press, 1993.

Hick, John. *God and the Universe of Faiths*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_. *God Has Many Names*. Westminster/John Knox Press, 1986.

\_\_\_\_\_. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993.

Karkkainen, Veli Matti. *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

Knitter, Paul F. *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

Mullins, David George, ed. *Religious Pluralism in the West: An Anthology*. Blackwell Publishers, 1998.

Netland, Harold. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Pinnock, Clark H. *A Wideness in God's Mercy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Race, Alan. *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *Toward a World Theology*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.

Truesdale, Al. *With Cords of Love*. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006. Chapter 4.

# Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

## Accountability

*In pairs have the students share their journals with each other.*

*Return homework.*

## Orientation

Christians can respond to religious pluralism in a number of different ways. Diverse responses have been stated and embraced by various Christian thinkers and parts of the Church. All the various responses achieve their forms based on how they answer three questions:

1. Who is Christ?
2. In what way is He active in the world beyond the Church?
3. What is the soteriological status of non-Christian religions?

Watch for the ways the various responses answer these questions.

The responses are sincere attempts to determine how the Christian faith should evaluate non-Christian religions. In this lesson we will present the diverse responses. We will not try to evaluate them. In Lesson 10, as we present a Wesleyan response to non-Christian religions, evaluation of the other responses will occur.

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts to key information and concepts.*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- understand and be able to discuss the five major responses to religious pluralism among Christians

## Motivator

Dr. Truesdale writes, "Each time Dr. Ron Benefiel and I conduct the Nazarene Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry Seminar, 'The Theological Development of the Minister,' the seminar members, Dr. Benefiel, and I attend Sabbath (Shabbat) service at Beth Shalom

*Ask the students briefly to consider the following question. Hard conclusions should not be reached. Just "kick-start" preparation for considering the material in this lesson.*

Congregation, a conservative Jewish synagogue in Kansas City. Alan Cohen is the senior Rabbi. The 'contemporary' service begins with joyous singing, accompanied by guitars, tambourines, a violin, and drums. Talented musicians lead the music. As the service proceeds, the liturgy—heavy with Torah readings—repeatedly refers to the holiness of God and to God's command that His people live righteously before him. Over and over one hears reference in the liturgy to the love and grace of God. As the Torah scroll is taken throughout the congregation, the congregants move to the aisles so they can touch the Torah either with their prayer shawls or their scriptures."

**The question:** Soteriologically, what is going on there? Nothing? Something? If so, on what basis?

## Lesson Body

### Small Groups: A New Religious America

(20 minutes)

*Divide the class into groups of three students each.*

*Spend some time in each of the groups listening to the discussions.*

*During this time you may want to read and respond to some of the students' journals.*

In your group read each others' papers.

Look for similarities and differences in reactions/responses.

Challenge each other to defend and support statements that have been made.

### Lecture: Responses to Religious Pluralism among Christians

(40 minutes)

#### Introduction

The responses to religious pluralism to be examined in this lesson represent sincere efforts to determine how the Christian faith should evaluate and relate to non-Christian religions. We will not try to provide a theological evaluation of each response. In Lesson 10, as we present a Wesleyan response to non-Christian religions, we will evaluate the various responses considered here to some extent.

The five responses are:

- pluralism
- inclusivism
- particularism
- a moderating position
- an evolutionary assessment of religious pluralism

In the conclusion we will connect this lesson to the previous one.

#### Pluralism

The pluralist response to religious pluralism holds that there are as many authentic expressions of religion as there are religions. Each religion has its own independent legitimacy. Its "truth" depends upon no other religion or religious vision for authentication. The only persons who can truly access, and hence profoundly encounter, a particular religion are those who participate in it, those who live in its wholeness, meaning, and power. All other persons are observers

*Refer to Resource 5-1 in the Student Guide.*

or visitors at best, and should not pretend to know the religion's significance and appeal. Nor should one religion propose to evaluate another on the basis of its own religious vision and values.

No religion can rightly sit in judgment upon another. People who believe their religion to be superior, and that it should replace the religions others embrace, thereby reveal their ignorance, arrogance, and oppressiveness. The religions should recognize in each other rich ways for "redemptively" encountering "ultimate reality" as known in each religious community. As a teacher, Dr. Truesdale writes, "I have taken students to visit many different religious communities. I have never sensed in any of them a perception that their belief structure lacked an essential element that only Christianity supplies."

According to this position, the appropriate relationship between the various religions is one of respect, tolerance, and mutual protection. In dialogue, the various religions can learn important lessons from each other, but dialogue should never be a cloak for proselytism.

Scholars who embrace the pluralist response to religious pluralism include D. Z. Philips, John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul Knitter, and Stanley Samartha.

**The *pluralist* assessment of religious pluralism takes *two* forms.**

According to the **first** form, while there is only one absolute reality, "God," God has many faces. To Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and other religions, "God" manifests himself in different ways. He has many rich *personae* through which to reveal himself. The various religions are so many different paths to, and accounts of, God. Wise observers of religion should not only recognize this, but also celebrate the "many faces of God."

Swami Vivekenanda spoke for this position at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Mahatma Gandhi also embraced this form of pluralism. The chief representative among Christians is John Hick, a major philosopher of religion. Many persons who identify with Christianity embrace this first option. For example, in the winter of 2002 some Episcopalians from Charleston, South Carolina, were shocked to find a Shinto altar in the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. When they voiced their

objections to the bishop of New York, he dismissed them as narrow-minded people who couldn't appreciate the many paths to God.

A true pluralism, the **second** form insists, must abandon any prior concept of a single "God." The wide differences among the religions are definitive and they should not be glossed over. The real and essential differences are so fundamental they may just keep us from arriving at a single definition of religion. Some religions are more similar than others, but there is no single commonality that applies to and unites all religions. For example, in Theravada Buddhism there is no God. That is one of the first concepts a person who follows this way must understand. He or she must also understand there is no real "self" (the doctrine of *anatta*) as Jews, Christians, and Muslims maintain.

According to the second form of the pluralist response, a true pluralism gives up on the idea of a "God with many faces," and just accepts religious diversity without trying to "fix it." Each religion should just be recognized for what it is. Otherwise, in our efforts to seek a unifying "God" behind the religions, the real character of a religion will be missed, and the real meaning of religious pluralism will be overlooked. Religions are context-specific. Except where there are families of religions such as the "Abrahamic" religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, or the Asian religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, talk about similarities should take a backseat to an emphasis upon distinctions.

The first form of the *pluralist* response is attractive to more Christians than is the second one.

I think the second form of *pluralism* is probably more conformable to "the ideology of religious pluralism" than is the first.

## Inclusivism

The *inclusivist* response to religious pluralism among Christians affirms there is only one God. He is the Triune God to whom the Old and New Testaments bear witness. God is the Creator and the Redeemer, and beside him there is no other God. He became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth and acted definitively in Him to redeem the world.

All other claims to deity are false. In the presence of Jesus Christ, every knee shall one day bow and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord, to the glory of

*Refer to Resource 5-2 in the Student Guide.*

God the Father. Jesus Christ is the Mediator between God and humankind. He alone provides the way of salvation (Heb 2:17).

Inclusivists reject the notion that the autonomy of all religions should be recognized. They believe Christians who adopt the first position are unfaithful to the New Testament and to orthodox Christian faith.

The question inclusivists seek to answer is, "How does Christ relate to persons in other world religions, and to the religions themselves?" In its answer to this question, *inclusivism* takes on two forms.

### **1. Cautious Inclusivism**

Clark H. Pinnock, systematic theologian at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, and John Sanders represent the first form. While affirming an orthodox Christology, they believe the prevenient grace of God is at work in all persons. They hold that the Spirit of God works to bring everyone to salvation, and He uses many vehicles to achieve this.

It is possible that one of the tools the Spirit may use is the non-Christian religion in which a person participates. So the Spirit of God may be active in non-Christian religions. The emphasis is placed upon the word "may." If through another religion a person responds positively to prevenient grace, he or she *may* be "saved" without ever hearing the gospel, and without ever explicitly confessing faith in Christ.

Pinnock and Sanders do not uniformly affirm that non-Christian religions are preliminary means through which God works to bring persons to salvation.

Even if while participating in a non-Christian religion a person responds to prevenient grace and is saved, the goal is still to lead the person to a full knowledge of Jesus Christ. Whatever role it might play, the religion is preliminary and passing. This form of inclusivism stresses that while the Holy Spirit may "use" another religion, non-Christian religions are not by themselves independent pathways to God.

Neither this nor the next form of inclusivism minimizes the differences between the Christian faith and non-Christian religions. Neither form is "rosy-eyed" about Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.

## 2. A Less Cautious Inclusivism

Much of the Tillich text is available on-line, "Religion On-Line," [http://www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter\\_id=1390](http://www.religion-online.org/cgi-bin/researchd.dll/showchapter?chapter_id=1390).

Karl Rahner, "Theological Investigations," a selection found in *Christianity and Plurality*, ed. Richard J. Plantinga (Ames, IA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 293.

The second form of inclusivism is represented in the work of Karl Rahner (1904-84), a German Jesuit and one of the most influential Catholic theologians of the 20th century. A grand presentation of the grace of God made possible through Jesus Christ marks Rahner's theology. Pinnock referred to Rahner as the "most famous inclusivist." One can find Rahner's position similarly stated by Paul Tillich in *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (1963).

Rahner assigned an importance to non-Christian religions not characteristic of Pinnock and Sanders. In *Theological Investigations* (1961) Rahner discussed the relationship between the Christian faith and the non-Christian religions. *First*, he believed Jesus Christ to be the one in whom the Father has acted to create and redeem the world. In Jesus, God became incarnate. The salvation He won through His life, death, and resurrection places a universal claim upon all persons. *Second*, Rahner believed Christianity to be the absolute religion. No other religion is its equal. Valid religion is limited to God's initiative and action in relationship to humankind, not to what people think about themselves or to what other religions tell them.

But *third*, while it is true that only through Jesus Christ is salvation made possible and offered to all, God reaches persons under diverse circumstances and at different times. Until the gospel explicitly enters a person's historical situation, a non-Christian religion can serve as a valid means to prepare for the coming of the gospel. After the gospel of Jesus Christ explicitly encounters a person of another religion, his or her old religion ceases to be valid. He or she must decide for or against God's truth.

What of the soteriological status of one who is faithful to his or her historic religious vision prior to hearing the gospel? Rahner answers that such a one is an "anonymous Christian," not a "non-Christian." The salvation that has reached the person is, by anticipation, Christ's salvation.

Rahner recognized that non-Christian religions show the marks of original sin and bear the weight of error regarding God. But they also contain "supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to persons as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ." For this reason, in varying degrees, they can be recognized as *lawful religions*.

We can see that the essential difference between Pinnock and Sanders on the one hand, and Rahner on the other, is that Rahner more actively affirms the role of the non-Christian religions as anticipatory instruments of God's grace, and much more readily identifies those who await the coming of the gospel as "anonymous Christians."

*Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, October 28, 1965, Documents of the Second Vatican Council, section 2.*

The Second Vatican Council "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)" sounds much like Rahner's position:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.

### **Particularism-Exclusivism**

The third response to religious pluralism is at polar opposites from *pluralism*. Either the term *particularism* or *exclusivism* applies. Ninian Smart refers to this position as "absolute exclusivism." As we shall see, there is a faint crack in the position that just might keep us from completely agreeing with Smart.

*"Pluralism," A New Handbook of Christian Theology, 363.*

Some of the best known particularists are Karl Barth, Hendrik Kraemer, John Piper, Ronald Nash, R. C. Sproul, and Carl F. H. Henry.

*Refer to Resource 5-3 in the Student Guide.*

As do inclusivists, particularists maintain that only through Jesus Christ can persons come to salvation and know God truly. The incarnate revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth is the Triune God's definitive self-disclosure. Through His Son, and by the Holy Spirit, the Father fulfills the promises made during the time of the old covenant. Only in Christ has God engaged the powers that enslaved God's creation, won our salvation, and set the captives free. Definitively and universally, the Father has provided redemption "by the blood of the eternal covenant" (Heb 13:20-21). All other so-called paths to God are false. The biblical and Christian criterion of religious truth, said Dutch theologian Hendrik Kraemer, "is the Person of Jesus Christ who is the Truth."

*Hendrik Kraemer, "Why Christianity of All Religions?" trans. H. Hoskins, found in Christianity and Plurality, 253.*

After this, the inclusivist and the particularist positions differ greatly. Particularists reject the inclusivist position that we can affirm Jesus Christ to be the only redeemer, and still affirm a positive role, even if limited, for non-Christian religions. Inclusivists who do this, particularists say, compromise the radical singularity and finality of Jesus Christ, and the preaching and reception of the gospel. Particularists believe the New Testament to be absolutely clear: the only way to salvation is through an *explicit* knowledge of, and expression of faith in, Jesus Christ.

*Particularists* ask how anything could be clearer or more final than the New Testament:

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved . . . 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in the one whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? (Rom 10:9-15).

To believe, one must *first* hear.

Additional texts to which particularists-exclusivists can appeal as showing that the Bible makes no space for salvation outside of the way God ordains are: Ex 20:3-6; 2 Chr 13:9; Isa 37:18-19; 40; Jer 2:11; 5:7; 16:20; Acts 26:17-18; and Col 1:13. The apostle Paul tells us the wrath of God abides on those who remain apart from Jesus Christ (1 Thess 2:16).

On the basis of texts such as these, particularists reject the idea that through prevenient grace as assisted by a non-Christian religion, persons can, even preliminarily, experience God's saving grace. While there may be very rare exceptional instances in which God reveals himself in a saving way, only persons who in this life hear the gospel and explicitly place their trust in Christ will be redeemed. All others are lost. There is no hope for those who pass from this life without having heard and responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"Is not this Christian truth a part of what drives Christian missions," *particularists* may ask? If either inclusivism or pluralism is correct, why should

Christians obey the Great Commission (Mt 28: 16-20)? If many of those who have not heard the gospel will be saved without hearing it, why should missionaries and evangelists suffer persecution to spread the gospel? Particularists fear inclusivists have subverted the missionary mandate and have betrayed the scandal of the Cross.

If one embraces this form of particularism, he or she must be prepared to recognize that the majority of men and women in the world will not hear the gospel, and they will therefore be lost forever.

There is a moderating strand of exclusivism—particularism—that differs a bit from what we have described so far. Harold Netland speaks for this moderation. He says that both *inclusivists* and *exclusivists* go beyond what the New Testament states. He advises that we should “adopt a modest agnosticism [lack of certainty] regarding the unevangelized.” We ought not to speculate regarding how God will choose to deal with those who have not heard the gospel. Leave that to God’s wisdom. Other evangelicals who agree with Netland are J. I. Packer, John Stott, Chris Wright, and Millard Erickson.

*Refer to Resource 5-4 in the Student Guide.*

*Harold Netland, Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Christian Faith and Mission (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 321.*

## **An Evolutionary Assessment of Religious Pluralism**

The last response is not currently prominent among Christians. It was probably most attractive to liberal Christianity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Representatives of the evolutionary position include R. C. Zaehner, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Ninian Smart, and Steven Constantine. This position depends upon an evolutionary estimate of humankind, culture, and religion. Just as biological, social, political, and intellectual life is evolving to higher orders, so are the religions. While some religions have advanced further along the evolutionary path than others, the final result is not embodied in any of them. All religions are undergoing evolutionary changes that will take them higher than they are now.

The evolutionary process now occurring in religion will eventually overcome the current differences and conflicts. Conflicts are tragic, unnecessary, and shortsighted. They ignore the direction in which all the religions are moving. We are already brothers and sisters and are becoming even more so. At this point in the evolutionary process, no one knows for certain what the outcome will be. But we know the process is

moving on a path that leads away from isolation and toward increasing dialogue and harmony. One day the process will deliver a harmonized world religion.

The Roman Catholic paleontologist and theologian, Teilhard de Chardin, had high expectations for the evolutionary process now occurring in the world's religions. But unlike Wilfred Cantwell Smith, for instance, Teilhard was confident that Christ is both the initiator—"the Alpha"—of the process, and its goal—the "Omega Point."

## Conclusion

As we can see, the range of responses to religious pluralism among Christians is wide indeed. We should not be surprised if persons ask, "How could Christianity entertain such diverse—in some instances contradictory—views?" In Lessons 7-11 we will try to chart a "Wesleyan way" through the thicket.

Discussion of the five responses has probably raised the question, How does the discussion of postmodernity relate to the five responses discussed in this lesson? Our discussion of the importance postmodernity attaches to many religious narratives, and its rejection of any single, overarching religious narrative all people "ought" to embrace, seems to rule out most of the options presented above. Strictly speaking, probably the only response that would closely conform to postmodern standards would be the second form of *pluralism*, the first of the five models. Even the first form of *pluralism*—"God has many faces"—sounds too much like a Western-engineered *metanarrative*. Postmodernity may at least tolerate the *evolutionary* estimate of religion. But its thesis would probably be seen as speculative, not practical.

We could choose the option of just dismissing any postmodern dissatisfaction with *inclusivism*, *particularism*, and the *moderating* response. After all, the gospel of God doesn't have to bow before or conform to modernity, postmodernity, or any other historical era. But may there not be another option? May it not be possible to remain true to apostolic faith and the Great Commission, even while rejecting so much as a scent of infringement upon the integrity and consciences of adherents of other religions? I believe the Wesleyan tradition provides this. In Lesson 7 we will begin to see why.

## **Guided Discussion: Student Response**

(15 minutes)

*Lead the students in a discussion of how the following might evaluate the various responses to religious pluralism among Christians:*

- *a fundamentalist Muslim*
- *a Unitarian*
- *an Orthodox Jew*
- *a Buddhist*
- *a secularized nuclear physicist*
- *a Primitive Baptist ("hard sell") minister*

## *Lesson Close*

(5 minutes)

### **Review**

*Do you have any questions or comments about this lesson?*

### **Assign Homework**

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

Read Acts 14:1-20; 17:16-34; Romans 5; 1 Corinthians 1:18-30; Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians. Write a 1- to 2-page response paper stating how these scriptures speak to pluralism.

Read Resource 5-5.

Continue working on your interviews.

*Truesdale, Al. With Cords of Love. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006.*

Optional Reading: With Cords of Love, by Al Truesdale, chapter 4.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator and Resource 5-5.

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## Lesson 6

# The New Testament and Religious Pluralism

## Lesson Overview

### Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	New Testament Passages Explored	Small Groups	Resource 6-1
0:30	The New Testament and Religious Pluralism	Lecture	Resource 6-2 Resource 6-3 Resource 6-4
1:15	Student Response	Guided Discussion	
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### Suggested Reading for Instructor

Achtemeier, Paul J., Joel B. Green, and Marianne Thompson. *Introduction to the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Forell, George W. *The Proclamation of the Gospel in a Pluralistic World: Essays on Christianity and Culture*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973.

Harink, Douglas. *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003.

Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

Runyon, Theodore. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.

Truesdale, Al. *With Cords of Love*. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006. Chapters 5 & 6.

# Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

## Accountability

*Call on several students to tell how they felt when they read Resource 5-5.*

*Ask if anyone has had a similar experience.*

*Return homework.*

## Orientation

Numerous books in the New Testament refer to a broader cultural environment thick with religious options. In this atmosphere the young Church was called to proclaim, "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Cor 5:19). According to His good pleasure, God had "set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9-10). Acts and the Epistles especially, reveal that in the Greco-Roman world there were many "so-called gods in heaven or on earth" (1 Cor 8:5). Luke tells us that when the apostle Paul entered the city of Athens he "saw that the city was full of idols." Paul had even seen one altar containing the inscription, "To an unknown god" (Acts 17:16-23).

In Ephesus, Paul's preaching of the gospel provoked a riot. So many people were turning from their worship of idols made by human hands that traffic at the temple of Artemis, and the sale of silver shrines devoted to her, was threatened. According to one of the silversmiths—Demetrius—whose business was threatened, Paul had preached that "gods made with hands are not gods" (Acts 19:23-27). In the name of the Alpha and the Omega, John of Patmos boldly confronted the emperor's claim to deity, speaking instead of "the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev 1:8).

This lesson—the entire module—proceeds on the conviction that the New Testament must be our standard if we hope to speak in "Christian" terms regarding Christ and other religions. Without equivocation, and in keeping with historic Christian faith, the Church of the Nazarene confesses Christ to

be “the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever.” He who is “the living bread” is the Word of God who “became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (Jn 6:51; 1:14).

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- be able to discuss how the writers of the New Testament responded to religious pluralism as it characterized first-century, Greco-Roman society
- understand and be able to discuss the challenge the New Testament proclamation of Christ presented to Greco-Roman religious pluralism
- have a clear understanding of the gospel the first-century Church proclaimed
- begin to see how orthodox Christian faith, based on the New Testament, responds to the charge that the gospel of Jesus Christ is “oppressive” with reference to other religions

## Motivator

The following statement comes from *The Myth of God Incarnate*, edited by John Hick, an influential book in the debate over religious pluralism. The book denies the incarnation of God in Christ the New Testament affirms, and hence sets the stage for one way of responding to religious pluralism. Will the New Testament permit Hick’s “solution”?

The Christians of the early church lived in a world in which supernatural causation was accepted without question, and divine or spiritual visitants were not unexpected. Such assumptions, however, have become foreign to our situation. In the Western world, both popular culture and the culture of the intelligentsia has come to be dominated by the human and natural sciences to such an extent that supernatural causation or intervention in the affairs of this world has become, for the majority of people, simply incredible.

*For an orthodox assessment of The Myth of God Incarnate by John Warwick Montgomery go to <http://www.mtfo.com/articles/bissart2.htm>.*

## Lesson Body

### Small Groups: New Testament Passages Explored

(20 minutes)

*Divide the class into groups of 3 students each.*

In your group, discuss the New Testament texts noted in the homework.

*Refer to Resource 6-1 in the Student Guide.*

What do the texts suggest regarding the religious scene into which the gospel came?

*Collect the homework papers at the end of the small-group time.*

What do the texts suggest for our situation today?

### Lecture: The New Testament and Religious Pluralism

(45 minutes)

#### An explanation for the instructor and students

Other modules in the modular series discuss in balanced ways the content of the gospel of God. This module's discussion of the gospel is meant neither to replace nor duplicate the other modules, and certainly not to disagree. The summary of the gospel that appears in this lesson occurs because the author wants to be sure that when discussing "communicating the gospel," we have ready at hand a reference of what the gospel of God is.

#### The Response of the New Testament Writers to Religious Pluralism

How did the writers of the New Testament respond to the plurality of deities and religions they encountered? Did they try to carve out space for Jesus as a "late-comer" in an already crowded religious community? Did they work to show the Greco-Roman world how He could be made into a respectful and accommodating resident? Or did they try to identify Jesus with one of the already existing deities, thus jump-starting familiarity with Him and making Him more readily acceptable? Finally, maybe in order to extinguish even a flicker of offensiveness, they could have done what some in Colosse wanted to do: treat Christ as one component in a host of deities, the full complement of which would constitute God's fullness.

None of this happened. From Matthew to Revelation, the authors of the New Testament, each in his own distinctive way, declared that the God who created the heavens and the earth has acted decisively and finally

*Refer to Resource 6-2 in the Student Guide.*

in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ to redeem the world. In Him the Kingdom of God has been inaugurated, is being realized, and will be consummated. In Christ all the promises of God to Israel, to all humankind, and to the creation, are being fulfilled. He is God's "YES!" (2 Cor 1: 15-22). Christ is in His person the Story of God. From one end of the New Testament to the other, Christ alone, through the power of the Holy Spirit, is affirmed to be the *apocalypse*, the revelation, of God.

Not only does the New Testament declare Christ to be the story of God, but He is also the story of humankind and the whole creation. He reveals God's truth for both. The apostle Paul tells us that God's plan for the fullness of time has been set forth in Jesus Christ. He is, declares Paul, the new and true humanity (Rom 5: 15-21). The creation too will one day, through Christ, "Obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). What the New Testament declares regarding the comprehensive work and person of Christ is unmistakable. Through (in) Christ, the Father is uniting all things in heaven and things on earth (Eph 1:9-10).

The apostle Peter said he had been an eyewitness to the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was present when the Lord "received honor and glory from God the Father." Peter had been on the Mount of Transfiguration when the God of Israel said, "This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (2 Pet 1:17).

In the Son of God, the great confession of Israel remains secure, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (the *Shema*—"Hear"—Deut 6: 4-5, RSV). This God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, seals the status of all so-called lords and gods. Their measure has been taken and their time is short. This is the clear witness of the New Testament.

## **The Universality of the Gospel**

The New Testament affirms "the singularity of the gospel" of God. This means "God's relationship to and purpose for the nations, and all creation is exclusively determined by and through God's cosmic-eschatological-healing in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit." All other cosmic principles—*stoicheion tou kosmou*—

including the Torah, are ruled out as providing God's relationship with humanity and the world.

The New Testament contradicts the historicist and some postmodern assertions that humans create all religious narratives. The New Testament declares Jesus Christ is *God's action* in history, not *humanity's action*. Its emphasis isn't even first of all upon human response. Its first emphasis is on God's action. God has acted in Christ to free humankind, the nations, and all creation from the enslaving powers that stand against God's purposes.

### **The Gospel Is First a Declaration About God and His Deeds**

Many of us are accustomed to speaking of the gospel as though it is first "news regarding humankind." Indeed the gospel is good news for all persons. It has the power to reconcile persons to God, to themselves, to others, and to God's creation. The gospel of God takes the measure of human brokenness in all its forms, and will bring healing to the nations (Rev 22: 2). For Wesleyans, as well as for many other Christians, the gospel of God achieves nothing less than *new creation*. It transforms all dimensions of human life, both personal and social.

But the gospel is "good news" first because it is news regarding God, and what He accomplished and is accomplishing, in Christ. The debate between Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes in Luke 21 is all about what God is like. The "tax collectors and sinners" hung onto Jesus' every word because He presented to them a word from God they had not heard, certainly not from the Pharisees and scribes. He is a God who, instead of letting the lost remain lost, goes out into the night to find them. He diligently seeks them, and then "lays them on His shoulders," or puts a robe around their wayward shoulders—all because He loves them and seeks their reconciliation. Wonder of wonders, on behalf of the lost He even makes himself vulnerable—out into the night. Finally, He is so happy when the lost come home that He throws big parties in heaven. The gospel of God is good news for us because it is good news about God.

*"Tell me how it stands with your Christology, and I shall tell you who you are." This is the point at which ways diverge, and the point at which is fixed the relation between knowledge of God and knowledge of men, the relation*

Those who set out to bear witness to the gospel of God must make sure they tell it properly. We begin with God, with the story of His being *for us* and *with us*, and *for* and *with* the creation. We begin with His purposes, His promises, and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Is

*between revelation and reason, the relation between Gospel and Law, the relation between God's truth and man's truth, the relation between outer and inner, the relation between theology and politics. At this point everything becomes clear or unclear, bright or dark. For here we are standing at the centre. And however high and mysterious and difficult everything we might want to know might seem to us, yet we may also say that this is just where everything becomes quite simple, quite straightforward, quite childlike. Right here in this centre, in which as Professor of Systematic Theology I must call to you, 'Look! This is the point now! Here I am in front of you (theology students), like a teacher in Sunday school facing his kiddies, who has something to say which a mere four-year-old can really understand. "The world was lost, but Christ was born, rejoice, O Christendom!"' (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics in Outline, 66-67).*

*Refer to Resource 6-3 in the Student Guide.*

the human condition to be considered? Indeed! But it doesn't define itself. One of a Christian minister's chief responsibilities is to make sure his or her telling of the gospel matches the gospel's true measure and designs, not the "gospel" as tailored by a culture, consumer interests, national agendas, class and gender privileges, or political power. Otherwise, the "gospel" will be drained of the power of God.

We begin with the deeds of God because if we don't we may, in the current pluralist atmosphere, be tempted to reduce the gospel to one religious story among many, to treat it as a socially constructed religious vision that can be politely tucked into the catalog of religious narratives. That is what happened to John Hick as noted in the quote located in "the motivator." Quarterbacked by modernity, Hick concluded that the Incarnation is a myth. "Supernatural causation or intervention in the affairs of this world has become, for the majority of people, simply incredible."

Christian ministers are to be "reporters," not "authors." The Church faces many temptations to make humankind—human interests, institutions, and culture—the measure of the gospel of God. To be sure, the gospel addresses all of these. But it doesn't find its origin or begin its definition in any of them.

## Who Is This God?

Who is this God about whom the gospel speaks? He is the God to whom the Old Testament bears witness—Yahweh. He is the One by whose word the world and all therein exist. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He is the One who through His prophets made grand promises of salvation to His people. Now He has *apocalypsed*—revealed—himself in Jesus of Nazareth.

After the Holy Spirit had loosed the tongue of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, he exclaimed, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors" (Lk 1:67-72).

The God who promises, who is faithful to himself, has now fulfilled His promises, not through another

prophet, but through His Son, the Only Begotten of the Father (Rom 15:8; Gal 3:15-18; Heb 10:23).

The magnitude of what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ should be spoken in terms of new creation. Paul says, "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). The Father's decisive action through His Son has opened space in the world and that space is new creation!

Douglas Harink says:

The new creation is in the *first* place Jesus Christ himself. In the *second* place it is the cosmos delivered from enslaving powers through the crucifixion. *Third*, it is disciples of Christ participating in Christ's death and resurrection through baptism into the Church, and living in the Spirit through loyalty of one Christian to another.

*Harink, Paul Among the Postliberals, 80.*

In Galatians, Paul says, "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything!" (Gal 6:14-15). The dawn of a new creation occurred in the crucifixion of Christ. There are two different worlds: the old cosmos and the new creation.

### **The "End" of Non-Christian Religions**

Rather than Christ finding His place among the religions of the world, the New Testament declares that in the purposes of God all other supposed paths to God will someday end. Even if non-Christian religions have in some way served to make people mindful of God (Acts 14:8-18), they will yield to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

In anticipation of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, God has been present in the world, providing to humanity and the nations preliminary knowledge of Him. He has used many vehicles—the Torah, the creation, philosophy, culture, and religion—for this purpose. The Law, for example, was a *paidagogos*—a teacher, a custodian—to bring persons to faith in Christ (Gal 3:23-25).

In Lystra, Paul used the citizens' worship of Zeus as a way to introduce them to the "living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them." God had not "left himself without a witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful

seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy" (Acts 14: 15, 16).

In Athens Paul used the philosophy of the Stoics and Epicureans as an opening for proclaiming, "The God who made the world and everything in it, he is Lord of heaven and earth." God had overlooked "the times of human ignorance." But now God "commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged 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: 24, 30-31).

In His revelation of the Father, the Son has been unwaveringly faithful, even unto death on the cross. Though in the very form of God, He did not cling to His divine status with the Father, but emptied himself. He took upon himself the form of a servant, was found in human flesh, and became obedient to death. God has highly exalted His Son, His suffering Servant. He has "bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2: 9-11, RSV).

The apostle Paul sketches the conclusion of God's purposes in His Son. "Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor 15: 24-26).

What Douglas Harink says about the announcement in the Book of Galatians is true for all the New Testament. "What occurs in the history of Jesus Christ is unsurpassed and unsurpassable; there is no reality, no historical or mythical figure, no system, framework, idea, or anything else that transcends the reality of Jesus Christ, for, in the strongest possible sense, God's action and the history of Jesus Christ are both one and singular." The gospel of this Christ, Harink says, "leaves no reserve of space or time or concept or aspect of creation outside or beyond or undetermined by the critical, decisive, and final action of God in Jesus Christ."

*Ibid.*, 68-69.

*Ibid.*, 69.

## Confronting the Charge That Orthodox Christian Faith Is Oppressive

As we saw in the previous lesson, in the postmodern climate those who think their religious narrative ought to be the narrative of all persons and who do not recognize that all religious narratives are made authentic only by those who embrace them, are "oppressors." They erroneously use their own religious vision, parochial in ways they don't even recognize, to run roughshod over others. "Totalizing" is a term often used to describe such oppression. It simply means one religion or culture thinks it has the "total" message for all others. It claims to have "total" knowledge with which all persons ought to comply. In a postmodern climate, "totalizing" is judged to be exploitative. It ought to be condemned.

*Ibid.*

By that standard, what this lesson has presented regarding the gospel certainly appears to qualify as "oppressive," "totalizing." We must not take this charge lightly. A religion that presents itself to the world as coercive, threatening, oppressive, and as an instrument of injustice will be and ought to be judged evil, Christianity included.

But Douglas Harink warns that those who want to strip the Christian faith of anything that might cause someone to characterize it as "totalizing" will do so by forfeiting fidelity to the New Testament. "Discriminating judgments, definitions, and differentiations, even 'totalizing' claims, are intrinsic to the grammar of apocalyptic [revelation] theology." If Harink is correct, and the content of this lesson supports him, then it seems a certain measure of offensiveness against the postmodern emphasis upon "many narratives" is unavoidable.

In his day, the apostle Paul had to make a decision between embracing the wisdom and power of God as manifest in the Cross, and appearing to Jews and Greeks as someone given to "folly." With all his being, he chose the former. "Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:22-24).

That being nonnegotiable, we are still faced with the question of how to proclaim this Christ. There are ways of proclaiming Him that misrepresent and shame the

gospel, turning it into what to many sounds like “bad news.” Persons everywhere ought, in the defense of justice, human dignity, and decency, to oppose all forms of proclamation that are exploitative, entrapping, coercive, and demeaning. The apostle Paul did (2 Cor 4: 1-6) and so should we. Persons must hear the gospel as healing, not as abuse.

The Wesleyan tradition charts a better course. In the next two lessons, let’s lay the theological foundations for a Wesleyan way of communicating the gospel.

## Summary

The Book of Revelation provides a summary of what the New Testament writers have said about Christ.

*Refer to Resource 6-4 in the Student Guide.*

Introducing the New Testament, 577.

Achtemeier, Green and Thompson identify three foundational theological convictions in chapters 4 and 5. These themes have been voiced throughout the New Testament in one way or another.

- God is the holy and transcendent God. On him everything in heaven and on earth relies. He is the Creator (Rev 4: 11) who makes all things new. God, not human or demonic powers, rules the world. God is sovereign. He guides the course of history toward its final triumph over evil.
- The Book of Revelation is a message of hope. The final victory is a matter of hope and expectation. Christian hope is grounded upon the decisive victory that has already been won through Jesus’ death and resurrection. He is the Lamb that was slain, yet he now lives and shares with God in ruling the universe.
- Worship, obedience, and honor are the appropriate ways to respond to God and to the Lamb.

## Guided Discussion: Student Response

(10 minutes)

*Allow for response.*

*Identify precisely why the young Christian faith could not accommodate itself to the religious pluralism it encountered in the Greco-Roman world.*

*Why did the Christian gospel succeed in a populace accustomed to religious pluralism?*

*According to Paul’s address to the Stoics and Epicureans in Athens, were pagans strangers to God? If not, in what sense was God “present,” and for what “purpose”?*

# Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

## Review

*Call on several students.*

Name a key thought from this lesson.

## Assign Homework

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

*Depending on your students and the schedule for this module, you may need to assign one of the sermons to half the class and the other sermon to the other half. They can then report to each other during small-group time.*

*Truesdale, Al. With Cords of Love. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006.*

Interview one layperson and one clergyperson and ask them to describe how the grace of God brought them to salvation. Write a one-page paper.

Read John Wesley's sermon "Free Grace," Resource 6-5. Or you may go directly to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-128.stm>. Write a 1- to 2-page response paper.

Read John Wesley's sermon "Justification by Faith," Resource 6-6. Or you may go directly to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-005.stm>. Write a 1- to 2-page response paper.

Optional Reading: With Cords of Love by Al Truesdale, chapters 5 and 6.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

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## Lesson 7

# The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Prevenient Grace, the Gift of Faith, Justification

## Lesson Overview

### Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Wesley Sermons	Small Groups	Homework
0:25	Prevenient Grace, Justification, and the Gift of Faith	Lecture	Resources 7-1—7-5
1:10	Student Response	Guided Discussion	
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### Suggested Reading for Instructor

Dunning, H. Ray. *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Greathouse, William M. *Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_, and H. Ray Dunning. *Introduction to Wesleyan Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988.

Harink, Douglas. *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003.

Maddox, Randy. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994.

Runyon, Theodore. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in the Light of the Wesleyan Tradition*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

Staples, Rob L. *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991.

Starkey, Lycurgus M. *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Truesdale, Al. *With Cords of Love*. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006. Chapters 7 & 8.

Wesley, John. *Works of John Wesley*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 2002 reprint.

# Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

## Accountability

*Call on 1-2 students to read their interview papers.*

*Call on 1-2 students to read from their journal entries for this last week.*

*Return homework and collect interview papers.*

## Orientation

For manageability, this topic of the Wesleyan way of salvation is divided into two lessons. The two lessons are divided according to the two grand branches of salvation: justification and sanctification.

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- understand and be able to discuss the theological foundations of the Wesleyan way of salvation

## Motivator

*Theodore Runyon, The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 8.*

*Ibid., 33.*

“The renewal of the creation and the creatures through the renewal in humanity of the image of God is what John Wesley identifies as the very heart of Christianity.”

“John Wesley is convinced that God’s Spirit is at work everywhere in the world extending God’s prevenient graciousness among all peoples.”

## Lesson Body

### Small Groups: Wesley Sermons

(15 minutes)

*Divide the class into groups of 3 students each.*

In your group read each other's papers on the Wesley sermons you were to read for homework.

*Collect the papers at the end of this time.*

Challenge each other on statements and comments presented in the papers.

### Lecture: Prevenient Grace, Justification, and the Gift of Faith

(45 minutes)

The Bible tells the story of the *free God* who is Holy Love. In contrast to idols of silver and gold who are nothing more than "blocks of wood" (Isa 44:19), "Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases" (Ps 115:3). His freedom is of a special kind. Unlike humans and the powers and principalities of this age, no *external limitations* can be imposed upon the Triune God. No finite creature can establish boundaries for him.

Some creatures, including humankind, have a limited measure of freedom. But theirs is a finite freedom that comes with all kinds of unavoidable limitations. By contrast, any limitations God may have are ones He places upon himself in the interest of His love. His freedom is one in which He is steadfastly faithful as Holy Love to himself and to His creation. "His steadfast love endures forever" (Ps 118:4). God freely acts in love, in loving freedom.

*The Perichoretic Personhood. In their mutual giving and receiving, the Trinitarian persons are not only interdependent, but also mutually internal, something to which the Johannine Jesus repeatedly refers (10:38; 14:10-11; 17:21). This mutually internal abiding and interpenetration of the Trinitarian persons, which since Pseudo-Cyril has been called perichoresis, marks the character of the divine persons and their unity. Perichoresis refers to the reciprocal interiority of the Trinitarian persons. The Father is not the Father apart from the Son and the Spirit. The Son is not the Son apart from the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the*

God's freedom refers first to the interrelationships—known as *perichoresis*—between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—the One God—and to the ways He acts to create and redeem. As the psalmists testify, His ways are marvelous to behold. "Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the LORD" (Ps 113:5-9). In His sovereign freedom God acts in history to "fulfill the prediction of his messengers" (Isa 44:26). In His freedom, God takes persons seriously, their personalities, their domestic histories, their religious

*Spirit apart from the Father and the Son. In each divine person as subject, the other persons also dwell. In so doing they do not cease to be distinct persons. Being in one another does not abolish Trinitarian plurality.*

*The bond of Triune life is love, and is characterized by freedom, the freedom of each Person for the Other, and then "freedom for us" (pro nobis).*

histories, and so forth. No one can tell God He must proceed according to some rigid pattern in His efforts to redeem. Think of how in 537 BC God surprised the Hebrews by using Cyrus, king of Persia, to achieve release for the captives. Or think of how He freely chose a virgin maiden of no social and religious distinction to give birth to our Lord. When the times had been fulfilled, God freely sent His Son in a form that scandalized the Jews and the Greeks (1 Cor 1:20-31). Of this much we can be certain: in His freedom God will always be faithful to himself, and hence faithful to us. For those who trust Him, God's deeds will provide ample reason for shouts of joy.

Having put this foundation in place, theological traditions do detect more or less regular paths by which the Triune God acts to reconcile persons to himself. These observations rest upon the Scriptures, tradition, and experience. They are valued because they help us understand the movements of God's grace in the Church and in our lives. They guide our proclamation, our expectations, and they help us know how to guide persons in the faith.

The Wesleyan tradition affirms the free God, and also—because of its study of the Scriptures, tradition, and our experience of faith—embraces a distinctive way of understanding God's ways with reference to salvation. We refer to it as "the Wesleyan way of salvation." It has to do with recognition, not with imposition.

We will now look at the elements of the Wesleyan way—sometimes called the "order"—of salvation. We do this to lay a foundation for "A Wesleyan Response to Religious Pluralism."

## **Prevenient Grace**

The doctrine of prevenient grace in the Wesleyan tradition is one of its strongest features. The doctrine is by no means unique to Wesleyans, but Wesleyan theology does provide special nuances. Perhaps not surprisingly, sometimes those who find the doctrine and its implications most difficult to understand and accept are members of denominations in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. They may have been deeply affected by Pelagianism and/or semi-Pelagianism. Or they may be steeped in Fundamentalism. None of these provide fertile soil for nurturing and receiving the doctrine of prevenient grace. Persons who come into Wesleyan denominations either from a Reformed or Lutheran background also often find the doctrine difficult to digest.

*Instructors should not be surprised if some students find the next two lessons quite challenging. They may be trying to overcome backgrounds that are simply not friendly to the Wesleyan understanding of grace. Good instruction will require patient explanation. By the same token, a person needs to confront the fact that if he or she intends to minister in the Church of the Nazarene, he or she must embrace her doctrines and their implications with understanding and conviction.*

Refer to Resource 7-1 in the Student Guide.

In the Wesleyan tradition we use the phrase “prevenient grace” to describe the initial movements—efforts—of God to achieve redemption of His creation. Prevenient grace is the “grace that goes before” to prepare persons to hear and receive the gospel. The goal and full expression of prevenient grace is faithful life in Christ. Prevenient grace *names* the active presence of the Holy Spirit prior to conversion as He seeks to draw all persons to repentance, and to “the obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5).

Wesley, Works, 7:188.

Even the most elementary interest in and knowledge of God is the result of the Spirit’s prevenient activity. The Spirit raises “the question of God” in us, no matter how embryonic the question may be. “It is not nature but the Son of God that is ‘the true light, which enlighteneth every man which cometh into the world.’ So that we may say to every human creature, ‘He,’ not nature, ‘hath shown thee O man, what is good.’”

Prevenient grace is “initial restored revelation.” Before the human “evangelist” or “witness” appears on the scene, the gracious God has already been there. He is already at work, and in surprising ways governed only by His purposes. For some persons such as this author, that reality is much easier to say than to embody.

Even now God sustains His creation by the word of His power. Both the Old and New Testaments declare and celebrate this. “You have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment they stand today, for all things are your servants” (Ps 119:90-91). Christ “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:15-17). His constant faithfulness to the creation is one reason for our believing the whole creation and all therein can abide in Him in unbroken love and confidence.

Wesleyans reject the notion some doctrinal traditions embrace, to the effect that we should distinguish between God as Creator and God as Redeemer. The notion is that while God creates and sustains *all persons*, as Redeemer He is *highly selective*. For the sake of His glory, and in a deed of undeserved mercy, God elects one part of humanity for salvation and another for damnation. Correctly, all persons are already dead in their sins and deserving of damnation, but according to some Christians, in His marvelous

grace, God elects to renew, reconcile, and give eternal life to some, not all. In this He is glorified. Wesleyans reject this doctrine!

We believe there is a “continuity of grace” between the orders of creation and redemption. In line with the New Testament, John Wesley taught that by grace God even now sustains the creation (Col 1: 15-17). If this were not so, the world would sink into oblivion. The same is true for all persons. They are immediately dependent upon the gracious Creator (Acts 17: 22-28a; Col 1: 15-20).

We think efforts to distinguish between God the Creator and God the Redeemer are artificial, imposed by prior theological commitments, and not required by what the Scriptures teach. To reaffirm, we believe wherever God is present, He is there as both Creator and Redeemer. Acts of creation and redemption are the gracious work of God.

Importantly, the New Testament declares the Son in whom God has revealed himself as Redeemer is also the One through whom the Father created and sustains the world. The Epistle to the Hebrews, for example, connects Christ as Redeemer and Christ as Creator. “Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds” (Heb 1: 1-2).

For John Wesley the continuity of creation and redemption is best voiced in the New Testament doctrine of “new creation.” With Paul, Wesley understood the fruit of the gospel to be “new creation” (2 Cor 5: 17). For him, salvation includes the individual, but it is also cosmic in scope. Wesleyan theologian Theodore Runyon says the work of Christ the Creator-Redeemer involves “nothing less than a *new creation* transforming all dimensions of human existence, both personal and social.”

*Runyon, The New Creation, 5.*

*Refer to Resource 7-2 in the Student Guide.*

*“The General Deliverance,” John Wesley, Sermon 60.*

One will not get very far into Wesleyan theology until he or she understands the relationship between creation, redemption, and new creation, and not until he or she understands how comprehensive is Wesley’s soteriology. For him, as it was for the apostle Paul (Rom 8: 18-25), the gospel will not have achieved its goal until there is “a general deliverance of creation.”

All creatures will share in the deliverance the Redeemer has won: “Nothing can be more express:

*"The General Deliverance," III.2.*

Away with vulgar prejudices, and let the plain word of God take place. They 'shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into glorious liberty,'—even a measure, according as they are capable—of 'the liberty of the children of God.'"

*Harink, Paul Among the Postliberals, 257.*

The words of Douglas Harink could have been spoken *verbatim* by John Wesley: the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth "leaves no reserve of space or time or concept or aspect of creation outside of or beyond or undetermined by the critical, decisive, and final action of God in Jesus Christ."

*Runyon, The New Creation, 8.*

The gracious relationship between creation and redemption is therefore at the heart of Wesleyan theology. "The renewal of the creation and the creatures through the renewal in humanity of the *image of God* is what Wesley identifies as the very heart of Christianity." Sustenance is part of God's nearness to His creation, but it involves more than mere preservation. His nearness is Christological, gracious, and redemptive. This means the Creator-Redeemer is nearer to the creation, including humanity, than the creation is to itself, for He is, as Paul says in Colossians, its center of coherence (Col 1:17). This is true for all persons.

Wesleyans therefore believe that according to the Father's creative-redemptive purposes revealed in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3-10), all persons are the object of "re-creation." To exclude anyone from the plan of redemption would be to remove from that person God's creative and re-creative presence. We believe all persons are provisionally included in Christ's atonement.

In one's very existence, through the Holy Spirit, the Redeemer is present as Creator and as wanting to be the Redeemer. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all persons might come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9). At primordial levels, and in creative ways no human can exhaust, the Creator-Redeemer seeks to bring all persons to faith and reconciliation.

*Wesley, Explanatory Notes on the New Testament, Acts 10:34.*

This is the rationale for the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace. The whole doctrine of God with His world undergirds it. The doctrine is bedrock for all that follows. "God is not a respecter of persons. [He] is not partial in his love. The words mean, in a particular sense, that he does not confine his love to one nation; in a general, that he is loving to every man, and willeth all men should be saved."

In the Wesleyan tradition, confidence in the gospel is partly anchored in our certainty that long before a person actually hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit is already working to draw them to Christ, to condition them to “hear” the gospel and be converted. We believe this happens both inside and outside the Church. Children in church are being “evangelized” by the Holy Spirit through the Christian examples of parents, through godly teachers and pastors, through Bible stories, the sacraments, and through prayer and sacred music. The Spirit works to “evangelize” adults in the Church who have yet to confess faith in Christ.

Outside the Church, the Holy Spirit isn’t at all immobilized. The ways the Spirit works in persons who have never heard the gospel will be as varied as the Spirit chooses. He certainly works through the conscience and through one’s religious sensitivities—one’s God-given “capacities” for God.

In His prevenient—anticipatory—work, the Spirit *restores* a person’s “moral sense” and freedom to respond to the Spirit. He removes—absolves—the *guilt* associated with original sin. Prevenient grace prompts “the first wish to please God.” It explains “the first dawn of light concerning God’s will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible to God and the things of God.”

*Wesley, Works, 6:500, 509.*

As we shall see, the doctrine of prevenient grace prepares us well to bear witness to the Christ of God in a pluralistic and postmodern world.

## **The Pardon of the Spirit: Justification**

There are two great branches of salvation:

- Justification—what God does for us through his Son
- Sanctification—what God works in us by his Spirit on the basis of Christ’s atonement

Broadly understood, sanctification includes regeneration, the “immediate fruit of justification.” The breadth of God’s saving work in us can be stated with one hyphenated word: “justification-regeneration-sanctification.” Transformation of the whole person is God’s intention, and justification provides the foundation.

*Refer to Resource 7-3 in the Student Guide.*

*Wesley, Works, 1:56.*

*Runyon, The New Creation, 42.*

In Paul’s teaching regarding the death and resurrection of Christ, he brought together justification and

regeneration. He described justification as being buried with Christ by baptism into a death like His (Rom 6: 4). Regeneration he described as being “united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5). This is what it means to be born anew by the Spirit. Raised with Christ, we now walk “in newness of life” (Rom 6: 4).

Refer to Resource 7-4 in the Student Guide.

### The major dimensions of justification are:

- **Repentance**

Mark 1: 15 and Matthew 4: 17 say Jesus began His public ministry with a call to repentance. Mark connects repentance with “hearing the good news” and Matthew with the nearness of the Kingdom. After Jesus’ resurrection He told His disciples that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in Christ’s name to all nations (Lk 24: 47).

The relationship between repentance, and hearing, believing, and receiving the gospel, is intense in the New Testament. Repentance and forgiveness of sins, and repentance and faith are inseparable. The most common New Testament word for repentance is *metanoia*. Its usual senses are a “change of mind” and “regret/remorse.” Both of these are included in the repentance associated with receiving the gospel.

Repentance also means “turning away from” (Mk 1: 4). More completely, it means an “about face.” By the power of the Holy Spirit a repentant sinner, broken in heart by his or her transgressions, confesses his or her sins against God and against others. He or she rejects and *turns away from* allegiance to the old order of hostility toward God, and *turns to embrace* the new reality, the kingdom of God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937, 1959), 64-65.

A readiness to obey, what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the first concrete step of obedience, must be joined to repentance. Repentance is an act of faith the Spirit makes possible. A repentant sinner must be convinced that “of Christ only cometh our salvation.” If one thinks more highly of oneself than that, then for him or her, the gospel will not be “good news.”

- **Reconciliation**

Reconciliation—justification—with the Father comes through faith in His obedient and faithful Son (Rom 5: 15-21; Heb 10: 7-10). In all things, even to death on the Cross, the New Adam, by the power of the Spirit lived in unbroken fidelity to His Heavenly Father’s will. He is the faithful and righteous one (1 Jn 2: 1), the

pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the “joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2).

Christ’s pioneering faithfulness is the meritorious basis of salvation. Our faith is in the Faithful One. Because of His faithfulness in all things, we call Him Savior, the Redeemer. God “justifies the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26).

Justification is the manifestation and work of the *righteousness* of God. This means the God who is holy love freely *gives* what He commands: reconciliation. The Law of God commands that we love, worship, and obey Him, and that we love our neighbor as ourselves. Sold under sin, dead in our trespasses, we can’t do this.

Wesley, Works, 5:56; 6:44-45; 508.

Works, 1:57.

Works, 6:509.

Justification means pardon, the forgiveness of our sins, the removal of guilt, and our reconciliation with God. The “plain scriptural notion of justification,” Wesley said, “is pardon.” The work of prevenient grace, Wesley said, “is carried on by *convincing grace*, usually in Scripture termed *repentance*. . . . Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; whereby, ‘through grace,’ we ‘are saved by faith.’ ”

All attempts to “do” our way into God’s favor only confirm the sinful independence from God we children of Adam have declared. Through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Father reconciles all who will abandon their own “righteousness” and radically rely upon his grace. Justification means pardon, the forgiveness of our sins, the removal of guilt, and our reconciliation with God.

- **Adoption**

Justification marks the beginning of the Christian life, our adoption by God as His sons and daughters. Justification “begins the process of restoring the image of God in us, for our lives are realigned for a purpose: not only to receive from God, but [also] to share what we have received with others.”

Runyon, The New Creation, 42.

Ibid.

Theodore Runyon explains that when by grace we repent of our sins and respond positively to the gospel, we “advance from the *porch* of prevenient grace to the *door* of justification and new *birth*.” This happens through the powerful action of the Holy Spirit. He convinces us of the truth of the gospel. He calls us to repentance and faith. He sustains us “in communion

Harink, Paul Among the Postliberals, 257.

Lycurgus Starkey, *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 49.

Refer to Resource 7-5 in the Student Guide.

Wesley, Works, 8:4.

Wesley, Works, 7:5.

Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 168.

Starkey, *Work of the Holy Spirit*, 115-16.

with himself through participation in his people.”

## The Spirit's Gift of Faith, and Human Response

John Wesley stood in complete harmony with the 16th-century Protestant Reformers who proclaimed that we are justified by grace through faith alone. Saving faith is radical dependence upon Christ for reconciliation with God. Pardon is applied to the penitent sinner through the faith the Spirit gives. Faith, says Wesley, is “the ear of the soul, whereby a sinner hears the voice which alone wakes the dead, ‘son, thy sins are forgiven thee’.”

The Spirit gives the power to believe, for “no man is able to work such saving faith in himself.” If saving faith were a human achievement, then salvation would be to some extent our own accomplishment. To receive the gift of faith and the Spirit of adoption is to be given restored fellowship with God.

Often persons who claim to represent the Wesleyan tradition have grievously erred by abandoning the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. They have, even if unintentionally, strayed into semi-Pelagianism at best, or Pelagianism at worst, by teaching that by our own “free will” we can turn to Christ in faith.

The truth is the will is “not free.” If it were, then the doctrine of original sin would have to be abandoned. Active response to the offer of salvation can occur only if the Holy Spirit makes that possible. The offer of faith and the ability to receive and exercise it are God's deed alone. *While the human response is a real and critical one*, it is a response enabled by the Spirit of God alone.

Faith in Jesus Christ unto eternal life is a gift from God. Humans contribute nothing to their salvation. Faith is both a gift and a Spirit-empowered response. Lycurgus Starkey says this Spirit-enabled “co-operation is characteristic of each phase of salvation.”

We call divine initiative and human response “evangelical synergism.” On the one hand the phrase makes clear that faith is God's gift alone. On the other hand it affirms a Spirit-empowered active human response. The divine initiative in “evangelical synergism” clearly defends the Wesleyan understanding of grace against those who say that

making a place for active response only reintroduces works righteousness.

## Guided Discussion: Student Response

(15 minutes)

*Read the two stories—one at a time.*

*Lead the students in a Wesleyan analysis of the two stories.*

*Flannery O'Connor, "Revelation," The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 488-509.*

### Story One

Flannery O'Connor's short story, "Revelation" illustrates the persistence of God's grace. Ruby Turpin was a self-righteous, self-congratulatory hypocrite, hence a stranger to Christian salvation. She described herself as "a respectable, hardworking, churchgoing woman." She seemed sealed in this cocoon until God used Mary Grace, a rude and "ugly" college student, to puncture it and let grace come in. In a turbulent scene, Mary Grace indicted Mrs. Turpin as a "wart hog from hell!" Strong language. But it was exactly what Ruby Turpin needed. Through Mary Grace, God called Mrs. Turpin to abandon her self-righteous pride of place and race, and cling only to the grace of God.

### Story Two

George Foreman was once the surly, scary, and mean heavyweight champion of the world. In a major upset on March 17, 1977, Foreman lost to Jimmy Young. Before the fight, Foreman felt empty. For some reason, while standing on the balcony of his hotel room, he prayed to a God he wasn't sure existed: "God, maybe you can take my life and use it. Maybe you can use me as something more than a boxer."

After the loss to Young, Foreman fell into despair. Then, according to his own account, he felt a giant hand carrying him out of the emptiness that surrounded him. He began to cry out, "Jesus Christ is coming alive in me!" Having frightened his handlers half to death, George ran to the shower, shouting "Hallelujah, I'm clean! Hallelujah, I've been born again!" A strange story? Not for those acquainted with the "amazing grace" by which God leads persons to new life in Christ.

# Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

## Review

*Do you have any questions or comments concerning this lesson?*

## Assign Homework

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

*Depending on your students and the schedule for this module you may need to assign one of the sermons to half the class and the other sermon to the other half. They can then report to each other during small-group time.*

*Truesdale, Al. With Cords of Love. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006.*

Read John Wesley's sermon "Christian Perfection," Sermon 40, Resource 7-6. Or you may go directly to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-040.stm>. Write a 1- to 2-page response paper.

Read John Wesley's sermon "Circumcision of the Heart," Sermon 17, Resource 7-7. Or you may go directly to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-017.stm>. Write a 1- to 2-page response paper.

Optional Reading: *With Cords of Love* by Al Truesdale, chapters 7 and 8.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

## Lesson 8

# The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Sanctification

## Lesson Overview

### Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:20	The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Sanctification	Lecture	Resources 8-1—8-5
1:05	Student Response	Guided Discussion	
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### Suggested Reading for Instructor

Dunning, H. Ray. *Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

Greathouse, William M. *Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_, and H. Ray Dunning. *Introduction to Wesleyan Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988.

Harink, Douglas. *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003.

Maddox, Randy. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994.

Runyon, Theodore. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in the Light of the Wesleyan Tradition*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

Staples, Rob L. *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991.

Starkey, Lycurgus M. *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Wesley, John. *Works of John Wesley*. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 2002.

# Lesson Introduction

(20 minutes)

## Accountability

*Call on 1-2 students to read their response to Resource 7-6.*

*Call on 1-2 students to read their response to Resource 7-7.*

*Allow the students to ask questions or make comments on the papers.*

*Return and collect homework.*

## Orientation

Justification and sanctification provide the two grand branches of Christian salvation. Sanctification begins with regeneration.

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- understand and be able to discuss the Wesleyan way of salvation as it relates to sanctification, repentance, and the holy life, growth in Christian holiness, and the new creation

## Motivator

*Runyon, The New Creation, 222.*

“What makes Wesley’s theology distinctive is his ability to hold together in a working union two fundamentally important factors in the Christian life that have often been disconnected, the renewal of this relation (justification) and the living out of this relation (sanctification), neither of which is possible apart from the other.”

## Lesson Body

### Lecture: The Wesleyan Way of Salvation: Sanctification

(45 minutes)

Refer to Resource 8-1 in the Student Guide.

#### The Power of the Spirit as It Relates to Sanctification

- **The New Birth—Regeneration**

Justification by grace involves a *relational* change between God and the penitent sinner. God removes the enmity—hostility—between himself and the penitent sinner, and restores a right relationship. Reconciled, we are at “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5: 1).

Regeneration and sanctification involve a *real* or *internal* change. Justification is theologically prior to regeneration, but they happen at the same time. In the new birth, God renews our fallen nature through the regenerating—re-creating (2 Cor 5: 17)—work of the Spirit. Justification restores the believer to God’s *favor*. The new birth restores the believer to the *image of God*. While justification removes the guilt of sin, regeneration takes away the power of sin (Wesley, *Works*, 6: 44-45). Both come through being “in Christ.”

Jesus called regeneration being “born from above.” He instructed Nicodemus, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Jesus said, “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3: 3, 6).

Regeneration is also the *gift* of eternal life (Rom 6: 23). “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn 3: 16; 10: 28, RSV). In keeping with the meaning of re-creation, Paul says if anyone is in Christ “there is a new creation.” The old passes away and all things become new (2 Cor 5: 17).

- **Sanctification**

Regeneration initiates the comprehensive inward and outward change of heart and life the New Testament calls sanctification (Rom 6: 19b-22). “At the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins.” We are inwardly renewed by the

Refer to Resource 8-2 in the Student Guide.

Wesley, *Works*, 6: 45.

*Wesley, Works, 6:44; H. Ray Dunning, Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 43.*

power of God. He changes "the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, into 'the mind which was in Christ Jesus'." H. Ray Dunning says, "The essence of sanctification is the renewal of humankind in the image of God."

*Wesley, Works, 6:45.*

For Wesleyans, sanctification involves the whole range of God's work in transforming His children into the image of Christ, and in bringing them to final salvation. Sanctification begins in regeneration, the new birth, and is called "initial sanctification." It continues in entire sanctification, in growth in grace, and so far as this life is concerned, concludes in glorification (1 Cor 15:51-54; 1 Jn 3:1-4).

The span of sanctification has *three* dimensions:

- we *have been* redeemed
- we *are being* redeemed
- and we *will be* redeemed

"We wait," says Peter, "for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home" (2 Pet 3:13). All three are essential parts of the New Testament's picture of Christian discipleship.

#### • **The Life of God in Christians**

Pivotal for the Wesleyan way of salvation is a confidence that because the Spirit of Christ now dwells in us, we are no longer debtors to the flesh. We believe the New Testament testimony to the atonement of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit heralds the priority of transforming grace over the priority of sin's power in Christians. It is the will of the Father that the Holy Spirit make effectual in us all the provisions of our Lord's victorious atonement. His victory He now shares, through the Spirit, with all His sisters and brothers. This has everything to do with grace and faith, and nothing to do with human achievement or sinless perfection (Col 2:8-15).

*Harink, Paul Among the Postliberals, 35.*

Douglas Harink calls attention to Paul's instructions to the Thessalonian Christians. His analysis accurately states what Wesleyans believe regarding Christian holiness. Harink says that not only did Paul condemn the Thessalonians' former idolatry, but he also called them to serve the one God of Israel in holiness as they conducted themselves "in their activities and relationships." While the Thessalonian Christians' walk in holiness was "always genuinely their own," it was also "wholly the work of God." From Him, through the Spirit, they have received "freedom from bondage to the powers of sin and death, power for holy life, and confidence in the love of God" (Rom 8).

*Ibid.*, 35-36.

The Thessalonians' participation in God's gracious work was to be "spread over the whole range of human life, active and passive, attitudinal and bodily, inner and outer, personal, social, and political." The holy life, Paul tells them, is a labor of love by which they participate in the work of God. All this is "good news."

*Ibid.*

The gospel had delivered them from the coming wrath of God and had reconciled them to Him. Now, through the Holy Spirit and baptism, the Thessalonian Christians share in Jesus' death and resurrection life. They are members of a new people, the *ekklesia*. In Jesus they have received "a new identity and the normative pattern of a new obedience."

The apostle Peter used similar language when speaking to "those who have received a faith . . . through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:1). When speaking of the life of God in Christians, Wesleyans believe no more and no less than Peter's compact summary: "His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness" (2 Pet 1:3).

### **The Grace of Entire Sanctification, or Christian Perfection**

*Refer to Resource 8-3 in the Student Guide.*

Sanctification is an important aspect of the Christian life for all orthodox Christian denominations. They teach growth in the image of Christ in all life's dimensions. They know sanctification occurs through the work of the Holy Spirit. It unfolds through prayer, programmatic spiritual formation, Bible study, love for one's neighbor, public worship, and more.

But in some denominational traditions, accompanying the emphasis on sanctification is a parallel belief that throughout this life, Christians should think of themselves principally as *sinner*s who have been saved by grace. One's sinfulness plays a central role in his or her identity as a Christian. Because the righteousness of God continues to be an *alien righteousness*, there is a sense in which the Christian's essential identity doesn't change. "Alien" means God now sees us through Christ's righteousness, but no real "impartation" of righteousness occurs. By this understanding of Christian life, discipleship *normatively* occurs as conflicted life. The internal power of sin struggles endlessly against Christ's call to obedient life.

So, a Christian should expect that throughout his or her life, the norm will be that sin will exert a powerful counterbalance to the grace of transformation. Christ has removed the guilt of sin. We have been adopted as the sons and daughters of God. And the Holy Spirit works in us. But the enemy continues to claim and hold a major portion of our real estate, which he will not have to surrender in this life. We *are* sinners, saved by grace.

Our sisters and brothers who view the Christian life in this way are correct: our righteousness is “alien,” and never our own. Now and ever more we are reconciled to God only through faith in the faithful Christ. Today and tomorrow, we are justified by grace through faith alone. But the picture is incomplete. It fails to give appropriate place to the role of the Pentecostal Spirit. The New Testament is equally confident that the Spirit of the risen Lord, as He promised, takes up residence, cleanses, and empowers us to live “according to the Spirit.” “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you” (Rom 8:11). No wonder Peter, who was there on the Day of Pentecost, is confident that God “has given us everything needed for life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). Upon this alone is the Wesleyan vision of Christian holiness founded.

I once heard an eloquent, African-American pastor in North Carolina say while preaching an Easter sermon, “Too many Christians are living on the right side of Easter, but on the wrong side of Pentecost.”

Distinctive of the Wesleyan tradition is the conviction that the Spirit of God can decisively “incline our hearts” to love Him and our neighbor as ourselves. We accept the New Testament call and promise that Christians are to live a godly life in Christ Jesus. To us the New Testament is absolutely clear; whereas we once yielded ourselves without reservation to sin, now that we have been raised to new life in Christ, we must present our whole selves “to righteousness for sanctification” (Rom 6:19).

*For a comprehensive statement of the biblical foundations for Christian holiness, including the hope of entire sanctification, see William M. Greathouse, Wholeness in Christ: Toward a Biblical Theology of Holiness (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998).*

We have heard, “Little children, let no one deceive you. Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous” (1 Jn 3:7). We believe God can so work in the regenerate heart, hungry for the holy life, that the hunger can be satisfied. Those who present their bodies as living sacrifices will find their sacrifices received. The Spirit’s promise is that the God of peace, through Jesus Christ, will comprehensively—entirely—

sanctify the child of God—spirit and soul and body (1 Thess 5:23-24).

This is the confident Wesleyan hope of entire sanctification to which we believe all Christians are called. The phrase “entire sanctification” describes a *decisive* event in which a disciple comprehensively presents himself or herself to Christ’s reign and glory, and the Holy Spirit bears witness to the presentation by sealing it with His powerful witness.

Intentionally *decisive* in character, marked by a qualitative *before and after*, entire sanctification is set within the entire process by which God renews His people in His image. It is requisite preparation for holy living. We believe entire sanctification to be an essential dimension of living according to the riches of God’s grace.

## Repentance and the Holy Life

The Wesleyan vision of Christian holiness becomes a reality by grace through faith alone. This means at every moment we are radically dependent upon God’s grace, not upon our own accomplishments or righteousness. Theodore Runyon says what makes John Wesley’s theology distinctive is his ability to hold together the renewal of the relationship between God and persons—justification, and living out the relationship—sanctification. A Christian does not leave justification behind and move on to sanctification. We continue to be reconciled—converted—to God by grace alone.

*Refer to Resource 8-4 in the Student Guide.*

If it is true that justification leads to sanctification, it is also true that sanctification endlessly unfolds in a process by which more and more of life is defined by the reign of God. What is provisionally established in entire sanctification becomes ever more explicit in the obedience of faith.

*Fanny Crosby, “Savior, More than Life to Me,” public domain.*

“Every day, every hour,” Fanny Crosby prayed, “Let me feel Thy cleansing power.” This should daily be the prayer of all Christians. Those who love God most dearly, and who are most open to His grace, are also most free to confess when they have neither loved God as they ought nor loved their neighbor as themselves. Rather than the life of Christian holiness shutting out recognition of failures that need God’s forgiveness, it should make us increasingly sensitive to, and repentant of, the ways in which we offend both the Holy God and our neighbor. For some reason, and to

our detriment, the Holiness tradition has tended not to understand the holy life in this way.

The life of Christian holiness has everything to do with God's grace, and nothing to do with a self-deceptive "perfectionism" that claims not to need confession. Grace and love make confession possible and urgent, not unnecessary and negligible.

As children of grace, we live between the "already" and the "not yet" of the kingdom of God. On the way to complete maturity, children of grace will be anxious to discover and confess the times they offend God and others. The Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive those that trespass against us," is a prayer for Jesus' disciples, not for strangers. At all times, pilgrims should be quick to confess where the image of Christ has yet to achieve its "full stature."

### **Growth in Christian Holiness**

The new birth and entire sanctification are essential punctuation points in a continuum of transforming grace. But they are not stopping points. They are portals of entry for continuing growth and transformation. The Spirit continually renews in us the image of God.

Christians live in the peace and rest of Christ, but there is no place for aimlessness or laziness. "The only man who has the right to say he is justified by grace," Bonhoeffer said, "is the man who has left all to follow Christ. Such a man knows that the call to discipleship is a gift of grace, and that the call is inseparable from the grace."

*Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, 51.*

The author of the Book of Hebrews said, "Let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 12:1-2).

### **The New Creation**

Among Christian theologians, few have been more expansive, hopeful, and confident regarding the grace of God than John and Charles Wesley. The thirst for the holy life did not waste itself on narcissistic introspection. Instead, Christ the Victor, who has big plans for His creation, had captured them. They had adopted Paul's cosmic sweep of redemption (1 Cor 15:20-28; Eph 1:7-10; Col 1:15-20). The God who

*Have the students look at these verses.*

wants all persons to come to repentance and life (2 Pet 3:9), and who includes the creation in the economy of redemption (Rom 8:18-25), fueled their preaching and hymn writing.

For them, new creation involves the whole creation. God is through Christ and by the Spirit working to redeem the heavens and the earth from all that sin has visited upon them. There is good reason for "Joy to the world." If one wants to embrace the Wesleyan way of salvation, he or she must spend no time in the shallows of a narrow soteriology. He or she must be prepared to follow the exalted Lord who is making all things new (Rev 21:5).

*Refer to Resource 8-5 in the Student Guide.*

Theodore Runyon:

There is a peculiar affinity between Wesleyan theology—especially Wesley's doctrine of sanctification—and movements for social change. When *Christian Perfection* becomes the goal of an individual, a fundamental hope is engendered that the future can surpass the present. [At the same time], a holy dissatisfaction is aroused with regard to any present state of affairs—a dissatisfaction that supplies the critical edge necessary to keep the process of individual transformation moving. Moreover, this holy dissatisfaction is readily transferable from the realm of the individual to that of society—as was evident in Wesley's own time—where it provides a persistent motivation for reform in the light of a 'more perfect way' that transcends any status quo.

*Runyon, ed., Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in the Light of the Wesleyan Tradition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 10.*

## Guided Discussion: Student Response

(20 minutes)

*Lead the students in an anticipatory discussion..*

*Allow for response and discussion.*

First we need to review the characteristics of postmodernity identified in Lesson 4.

*Is the Wesleyan tradition well positioned theologically for ministry in a postmodern, religiously pluralistic world?*

*If, not, why not?*

*But if the answer is "Yes," then "What might some of the contributing features be?"*

## Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

### Review

*Call on the students to respond.*

*What one thing stands out to you from this lesson?*

### Assign Homework

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

Read John Wesley's sermon, "The Almost Christian," Resource 8-6. Or you may go to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/serm-002.stm>. Write a 1- to 2-page response paper.

You should be close to completion on the interviews and report as assigned in the Syllabus.

Bring your journal to the next class session. Be prepared to share a selection with the class.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

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## Lesson 9

# A Wesleyan Response to Non-Christian Religions, Part 1

## Lesson Overview

### Schedule

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	Response to Wesley Sermon	Small Groups	
0:25	The Universality of Prevenient Grace	Lecture	Resources 9-1—9-6
1:10	Student Response	Guided Discussion	
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### Suggested Reading for Instructor

Cunningham, Floyd T. "Christ, the Word, the Light and the Message: A Wesleyan Reflection on World Mission." *Asia Journal of Theology* 5 (April 1991).

Dunning, H. Ray. *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988.

Flemming, Dean. "Foundations for Responding to Religious Pluralism." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31 (1996).

Maddox, Randy. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994.

Meadows, Philip R. "Candidates for Heaven: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35 (Spring 2000).

Noss, John B. *Man's Religions*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974.

Sermons of John Wesley. <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/>.

Starkey, Lycurgus M. *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Truesdale, Al. *With Cords of Love*. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006. Chapters 9 & 10.

# Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

## Accountability

*Call on the students to share a selection from their journals.*

*Return homework. Response papers will be collected later.*

## Orientation

Having established as a foundation the Wesleyan way of salvation, let's now develop a Wesleyan response to religious pluralism.

We will devote the next two lessons to the Wesleyan response.

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- understand and be able to discuss the Wesleyan response to religious pluralism
- understand and discuss the nature and importance of positive responses to prevenient grace by persons in non-Christian religions
- possess a Wesleyan theological rationale that will equip them for ministry in a religiously pluralistic world

## Motivator

“What, if I were to see a Papist, an Arian, a Socinian casting out devils? If I did, I could not forbid even him, without convicting myself of bigotry. Yea, if it could be supposed that I should see a Jew, a Deist, or a Turk, doing the same, were I to forbid him either directly or indirectly, I should be no better than a bigot still.

“O stand clear of this! But be not content with not forbidding any that casts out devils. It is well to go thus far; but do not stop here. If you will avoid all bigotry, go on. In every instance of this kind, whatever the instrument be, acknowledge the finger of God. And not only acknowledge, but rejoice in his work, and praise his name with thanksgiving. Encourage whomsoever God is pleased to employ, to give himself wholly up thereto. Speak well of him wheresoever you

*Wesley, "Against Bigotry," Sermon  
38, IV, 4-5.*

are; defend his character and his mission. Enlarge, as far as you can, his sphere of action; show him all kindness in word and deed; and cease not to cry to God in his behalf, that he may save both himself and them that hear him."

## Lesson Body

### Small Groups: Response to Wesley Sermon

(15 minutes)

*Divide the class into groups of 3 students each.*

In your groups share your response papers on Wesley's sermon, "The Almost Christian."

Challenge each others' comments and thoughts.

Decide on key points that are important for Christianity today.

*Collect homework papers.*

### Lecture: The Universality of Preventive Grace

(45 minutes)

The various branches of Christianity respond to religious pluralism in ways that conform to their defining theological visions. The options are numerous. Based on how we Wesleyans understand the Christian order of salvation, we too have a distinctive way of approaching and assessing religious pluralism. The Wesleyan tradition's distinctive doctrinal characteristics are clearly stamped on its response. Our theology should guide the way we engage in evangelism and missions.

Quite unlike those Christians who have embraced the ideology of religious pluralism, Wesleyans unambiguously affirm the Christology of historic Christian faith.

Even while unambiguously making this confession, Wesleyans have the resources to live with genuine respect for persons of other religions, and to oppose religious oppression and manipulation in all their forms. In an era when religious extremists seem bent on reducing their opponents to enemies—either verbally or physically—Wesleyans take a different course. In his sermon, "Against Bigotry" (Mk 9: 38-39), Wesley said:

*Have the students return to the Motivator in the Student Guide.*

What, if I were to see a Papist, an Arian, a Socinian casting out devils? If I did, I could not forbid even him, without convicting myself of bigotry. Yea, if it could be supposed that I should see a Jew, a Deist, or a Turk, doing the same, were I to forbid him either directly or indirectly, I should be no better than a bigot still.

*"Against Bigotry," Sermon 38, IV, 4-5.*

O stand clear of this! But be not content with not forbidding any that casts out devils. It is well to go thus far; but do not stop here. If you will avoid all bigotry, go on. In every instance of this kind, whatever the instrument be, acknowledge the finger of God. And not only acknowledge, but rejoice in his work, and praise his name with thanksgiving. Encourage whomsoever God is pleased to employ, to give himself wholly up thereto. Speak well of him wheresoever you are; defend his character and his mission. Enlarge, as far as you can, his sphere of action; show him all kindness in word and deed; and cease not to cry to God in his behalf, that he may save both himself and them that hear him.

*Refer to Resource 9-1 in the Student Guide.*

As noted before, Wesley affirmed the incarnation of God in Jesus of Nazareth. He believed there salvation for God's creation in Christ alone. Without ambivalence, for Wesleyans, Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and Life (Jn 14:6). He is humankind's way home to the Father.

But Wesley did not believe these affirmations provide a warrant for coercing others to embrace them. He believed the way we announce the gospel must evidence the character of God and the gospel itself. What the herald "heralds," and the way he or she does it, must reveal the incarnate God who rode into Jerusalem on the back of a lowly donkey, not the back of a horse of war.

As Wesley's warnings against bigotry show, the reality of prevenient grace should lead Wesleyans to respect the ways the Holy Spirit is already working in all persons. Wesleyans are partners with the God who is already present; they are neither brokers who introduce God's presence nor enforcers who have to ensure His effectiveness. He is the free and sovereign God. The Holy Spirit will use whatever instrument He chooses, and when He chooses.

*"Against Bigotry," Sermon 38, I.1.*

*Ibid., I.5.*

Wesley recognized that the non-Christian world is marked by greater darkness than light. He knew that even as God "dwells and works in the children of light, so the devil dwells and works in the children of darkness. . . . The god and prince of this world still possesses all who know not God." But Wesley did not easily place all so-called Christians in the first category and all non-Christians in the second. He knew the devil holds fast many who identify themselves as "Christian." "The god of this world holds his English worshipers full as fast as those in Lapland." And he

knew there are those in non-Christian religions who, according to the light they have, are attentive to the will of God.

*Philip R. Meadows, "Candidates for Heaven: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions," Wesleyan Theological Journal 35 (Spring 2000), 98-101.*

*Cunningham, 109.*

Wesley's openness to what God might do in the lives of persons in other religions had everything to do with confidence in God's grace, and nothing to do with embracing the ideology of religious pluralism or humanistic optimism. Church historian Floyd Cunningham says, "The theology of prevenient grace acknowledges the depth of human sin while attributing all the slightest motions toward God in the human soul to divine grace." Careful qualifications must be attached to what may be expected of prevenient grace.

### **A Reminder: The Universality of Prevenient Grace**

*Refer to Resource 9-2 in the Student Guide.*

As stated in Lessons 7 and 8, the centerpiece for developing a Wesleyan response to religious pluralism is the doctrine of prevenient grace. As we saw, prevenient grace is universally inclusive and pivotal for grasping John Wesley's understanding of Christian redemption.

### **For the Wesleyan Tradition, All Grace Is "Christic"**

*"The Righteousness of Faith," Sermon 6, 1.*

Through the Son and by the Spirit's power the Father acts to create and redeem. The inclusive range of God's gracious activity is universal, and it is anchored in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Even when we speak of God's creative and redemptive work in the Old Testament we speak in a preliminary and anticipatory manner of Jesus Christ. Wesley believed correctly—in harmony with most contemporary New Testament scholarship—that there is only one covenant of grace. For him, God through Jesus Christ has "established [one covenant of grace] with men of all ages—as well as before, and under the Jewish dispensation, as since God was manifest in the flesh."

Karl Barth agreed:

*Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 63-64.*

All that exists points towards man, in so far as it makes God's purpose visible, moving towards His revealed and effective action in the covenant with Jesus Christ. The covenant is not only quite as old as creation; it is older than it. Before the world was, before heaven and earth were, the resolve or decree of God exists in view of this event in which

God willed to hold communion with man, and it became inconceivably true and real in Jesus Christ.

*Karl Barth, Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5 (New York: Collier Books, 1962).*

For this reason, Barth said, we should speak of “Christ and Adam,” not “Adam and Christ.”

Wesley was clearly in line with the apostles Peter and Paul. The apostle Peter said:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look! (1 Pet 1:10-12).

The apostle Paul said:

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ (1 Cor 10:1-4).

*See also Mt 2:23; Lk 1:70; 18:31; Jn 1:45; 8:52; Acts 2:14-36.*

Further, as we saw in the previous lesson regarding the continuity of grace in creation and redemption, the providential presence and activity of the Spirit in all creation is Christic in quality. All revelation is grounded in Christ.

### **A Difference from the Reformers**

As we saw in Lessons 7 and 8, John Wesley was in complete solidarity with the Reformation regarding the doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. “For the sake of his well-beloved Son, [on the basis] of what he hath done and suffered for us, God now vouchsafes, on one only condition [an exercise of faith that is the gift of God alone] . . . both to remit the punishment due to our sins, to reinstate us in his favour, and to restore our dead souls to spiritual life, as the earnest of life eternal.” This is what God does for us through his Son.

*“Justification by Faith,” Sermon 5, I.8.*

Without stepping back from this biblical and Reformation doctrine one bit, Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace did significantly establish a different direction with regard to how God's reconciling grace reaches us.

To begin, as we have already seen, Wesley believed the gospel is meant for all persons, not for just an elect and predestined few. Wesley was in harmony with Romans 5:18: "Just as one man's trespasses led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all." Christ has overcome death, hell, sin, and the grave on behalf of all persons.

Just as the Father took the initiative in sending His Son, even so the Triune God—from the Father, by the Son, and through the Holy Spirit—takes the gracious initiative in His manifold efforts to bring all persons to reconciliation in Christ. God leaves no person unattended by grace. No person anywhere "is in a state of mere nature . . . that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called 'natural conscience.' But this is not natural; it is more properly termed 'preventing grace.'"

*"On Working Out Our Own Salvation," Sermon 85.*

Though apart from the grace of God we are dead in our trespasses and sins, because of the prevenient movement of the Spirit no person is a stranger to God's efforts to redeem. Philip Meadows says because of prevenient grace, "no human being actually occupies the limiting conditions of total depravity, for prevenient grace is at work in all people through the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit." He adds, "The existence of conscience, liberty, and moral agency are all expressions of the Spirit's ameliorating presence."

*Meadows, "Candidates for Heaven," 102.*

### **The Holy Spirit's Universal Faithfulness**

No one can formulate in advance how prevenient grace will begin to stir one's hunger for God, or predict the paths by which the Spirit will urge him or her toward an evangelical encounter with Christ. But we can be certain the Holy Spirit works to awaken one to his or her hopelessness without God's mercy, and to attract him or her to salvation. A full recognition of the claim Christ makes upon us may occur suddenly and explicitly, or it may dawn slowly, without our being explicitly conscious of God having been at work in us. Prevenient grace may be assisted by hymns, Scripture, the sacrament of infant baptism, parents, Sunday

*Refer to Resource 9-3 in the Student Guide.*

School teachers, and so forth. It may be so subtle that only in retrospect can we trace its movements.

Prevenient grace diminishes neither one's recognition of spiritual death, one's radical dependence upon God's mercy, nor the decisive quality of the new birth. But how or when such an encounter will occur rests with the Sovereign God. We know only it happens as a confluence of the workings of God's mysterious grace in a complex of religious, psychological, social, and many other factors, many of which may never be known.

*Meadows, "Candidates for Heaven," 102.*

Philip Meadows says, "It is through this 'gracing' of human nature that the ability to discern between good and evil is incipiently restored." It is manifest in the form of "conscience," that "God-given capacity for critical self-reflection." Prevenient grace has full evangelical encounter with Christ—revealed in His fullness by the Holy Spirit through explicit preaching or witness—and Christian holiness as its final goal. All of the Holy Spirit's activity flows in the direction of salvation for persons and the creation. This is a Wesleyan understanding of "in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17).

### **The Possibility of Responding Positively to Prevenient Grace**

*Refer to Resource 9-4 in the Student Guide.*

Prevenient grace extends to all persons without reference to the historical, cultural, or religious context in which they are born, whether they be Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian. Prevenient grace is the real presence of the Spirit of Christ in the soul. Therefore we ought not to be surprised to learn there are persons, whatever their religion, who respond positively to God's grace according to the light God has given to them. Wesley believed when a person responds positively to prevenient grace, there results positive renewal in some measure.

*Meadows, "Candidates for Heaven," 105.*

This language is correct so long as we realize that "light" is the fruit of the prevenient presence of Christ, and not the fruit of human achievement or the product of one's non-Christian religion. The "light" of prevenient grace is an anticipatory step on the way to a full evangelical encounter with Jesus Christ, "a *transforming* personal and experimental relationship with God." No full revelation of Christ as the Redeemer is possible apart from an enlightened hearing—or reading—of the Scriptures, and apart from the proclamation of Christ that comes through the Holy Spirit.

## Protecting the Goal of Preventive Grace

God's definitive revelation of himself in Jesus, the Word *enfleshed* among us, has its normative expression in Scripture. And the Spirit bears witness to Scripture's faithfulness to Christ. So there is no full hearing or understanding, and hence no full reception, apart from the Scriptures. The provisions for recovering holiness as the adopted sons and daughters of God lie partly and importantly, *but not solely*, with preventive grace, initial restored revelation. Its goal is completed in transformation by the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to the Scriptures. He alone can open the mind to hear and obey what the Scriptures tell us regarding Christ, repentance, regeneration, and the holy life. Preventive grace points and leads toward a transforming personal and "experimental" (Wesley)—experiential—relationship with God. Only then can one cry "Abba! Father!" in filial love and devotion.

Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 32.

Meadows, "Candidates for Heaven," 105.

## The "Faith of a Servant"

Positive response to preventive grace introduces a distinction between the "*faith of a servant*" based on "fearing God," and the "*faith of a Son*" marked by the indwelling witness of the Holy Spirit. Love for God and for one's neighbor, coming through evangelical transformation, characterizes such a person.

The Sermons of John Wesley, "On Faith," Sermon 106.

Meadows, "Candidates for Heaven," 105.

Philip Meadows notes that for Wesley, "'all the sorts of faith which we can conceive are reducible to one or other of the preceding [i.e., faith of a servant or faith of a son]' which is equivalent to the faith of a servant."

"On Faith," I.10.

The *faith of a servant* is a "divine conviction of God, and the things of God." Even in its "infant state" it "enables every one that possesses it to 'fear God and work righteousness.' And whosoever, in every nation, believes thus far, the Apostle declares, is 'accepted of him.' He actually is, at that very moment, in a state of acceptance. But he is at present only a *servant* of God, not properly a *son*. Meantime, let it be well observed, that 'the wrath of God' no longer 'abideth on him.'" In response to preventive grace, a person marked by the "*faith of a servant*" expresses reverence for God, avoids evil, and to the best light he or she has, does all things well.

Refer to Resource 9-5 in the Student Guide.

The "*faith of a servant*" marks what Wesley calls the "*almost Christian*." Wesley uses the phrase "heathen honesty" to characterize the "almost Christian" outside the Christian religion. A person of "heathen honesty" who has never heard of Christ, but who loves and

practices truth and justice, is through prevenient grace an “almost Christian.”

*“The Almost Christian,” I: (1.)1.*

The “almost Christian” refrains from being unjust. He or she does not “take away their neighbor’s goods, either by robbery or theft.” He or she does not oppress the poor and does not use extortion toward any. He or she does not “cheat or overreach either the poor or rich, in whatsoever commerce they [have] with them.” He or she defrauds no one of his or her right. If possible, he or she owes no one anything. Wesley identifies numerous more characteristics of the “almost Christian,” some of which are peculiar to persons associated with Christianity, but who are not Christians “inwardly.”

*Meadows, “Candidates for Heaven,” 107.*

Philip Meadows concludes that for John Wesley, based on the meaning and efficacy of prevenient grace, “It is . . . the faith of the heathen or the Jew which is the condition of their acceptance, not the fear of God or the working of righteousness as such.” As the apostle Paul says of Abraham and all others (Rom 4:1-25), acceptance before God never comes through works.

*I want to be careful not to overstate the difference between Rahner and Wesley.*

As we saw in Lesson 3, the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner spoke of persons who respond positively to prevenient grace as “anonymous Christians.” Both the “almost Christians” marked by the “faith of a servant” Wesley describes, and Rahner’s “anonymous Christians” have responded positively to prevenient grace. But unlike Rahner, Wesley doesn’t identify the “almost Christian” as a Christian. He or she is accepted by God as was Cornelius (Acts 10). But acceptance and release from the wrath of God anticipates evangelical transformation and the witness of the Holy Spirit.

The “altogether Christian” is one inwardly. By grace and through faith alone he or she has become a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). There has occurred in him or her a transforming encounter with Jesus Christ. The old has passed away, and through the work of the Holy Spirit all things have become new. Love for God and love for one’s neighbor in the image of Christ mark the “altogether Christian.”

Wesley asks:

What more than “almost” is meant by “altogether?” I answer *first*, the love of God. For thus saith his word, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” Such a love is this, as engrosses the whole heart, as rakes up all the

*"The Almost Christian," II: (1.)1.*

affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties. He that thus loves the Lord his God, his spirit continually "rejoiceth in God his Saviour." His delight is in the Lord, his Lord and his All, to whom "in everything he giveth thanks." All his desire is unto God, and to the remembrance of his name.

The *second* thing implied in the being *altogether a Christian* is "the love of one's neighbour." He or she is a true, real, inward, scriptural, or altogether Christian. Such transformation enables him or her to say with love and devotion, "Abba! Father!"

A biblical basis for Wesley's position regarding the "almost Christian" is the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10. When speaking in the house of Cornelius, the apostle Peter announced, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34). Commenting on Peter's statement, Wesley said, "He that, *first*, reverences God, as great, wise, good, the cause, end, and governor of all things; and *secondly*, from this awful regard to him, not only avoids all known evil, but endeavours, according to the best light he has, to do all things well, is accepted of [God]."

*"The Almost Christian."*

We might ask, "How?" Wesley's answer illustrates what we have said regarding prevenient grace and its Christological character. "Through Christ, though he knows him not. The assertion is express, and admits of no exception. He is in the favour of God, whether enjoying his written word and ordinances or not." This is the faith of the servant. For those who have entered evangelical faith—the faith of a son—the written word and the elements of evangelical faith bring "an unspeakable blessing to those who were before in some measure accepted."

*John Wesley, Explanatory Note upon the New Testament, Acts 10:35.*

Had the "faith of a servant" been adequate quite apart from an evangelical encounter with the risen Christ, "God would never have sent an angel from heaven to direct Cornelius to St. Peter."

Importantly, God's acceptance of Cornelius was an "acceptance through Christ," even though Cornelius "knew him not." Cornelius' righteous works were done through the grace of Christ. Cornelius demonstrates that even in an anticipatory state, a divine conviction of God's reality and the things of God can be obeyed. Such a person, responding positively to the prevenient Christ, will be brought finally to eternal salvation. The

wrath of God, Wesley believed, no longer abides upon such a person.

*“On Charity,” Sermon 91, 1:3.*

Wesley said God “is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the heathens also; that he is ‘rich in mercy to all that call upon him’ according to the light they have.” As to final salvation of those in other religions, Wesley believed we should leave the matter to God, and not speak as though He had left that decision to us. We will be wise to leave to God the question of how He will assess the fruit of prevenient grace.

*Refer to Resource 9-6 in the Student Guide.*

In words similar to those spoken by Harold Netland—Lesson 3—Wesley said:

I have no authority from the Word of God “to judge those that are without.” Nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and [Muslim] world to damnation. It is far better to leave them to him that made them, and who is “the Father of the spirits of all flesh;” who is the God of the heathens as well as the Christians, and who hateth nothing that he hath made.

*Wesley, Works 5:21.*

Wesley’s comments regarding Cornelius demonstrate that obedience to the prevenient working of Christ marks a person as “accepted by God” through Christ (Acts 10:34-35). The witness of the New Testament is clear about this, and the Wesleyan tradition is in full harmony with it.

However, a warning must be issued and heeded. As rich as the doctrine of prevenient grace is for the Wesleyan tradition, we do not collapse the full proclamation of the gospel and regeneration by the Spirit into prevenient grace. While “the faith of a servant” is to be recognized and affirmed, there is a sharp qualitative difference between it and the “faith of a son.”

*Apart from an explicit revelatory encounter with Christ through hearing the word of the gospel, persons do not “know” Christ manifest. They have not experienced regeneration and adoption by the Spirit. Nor have they experienced the indwelling witness of the Spirit by which the regenerate cry, “Abba, Father!” As important as is the prevenient work of Christ, it is anticipatory. Peter recognized that “in every nation anyone who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:35). But he did not stop there. He promoted the completion of prevenient grace by openly proclaiming Christ (Acts 10:42-43).*

## **Guided Discussion: Student Response**

(15 minutes)

*Allow for response and discussion.*

*What are the strengths of the Wesleyan tradition with reference to communicating the gospel in a religiously pluralistic world?*

*Are there weaknesses?*

*What are the risks?*

*How might the Wesleyan approach be applied in practice?*

# Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

## Review

*Allow for response.*

*What questions or comments do you have concerning this lesson?*

## Assign Homework

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

Read John Wesley's sermon "On Faith," Resource 9-7. Or you may go to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/weslew/sermons/serm-106.stm>. Write a 1- to 2-page response paper.

Begin working on your credo as assigned in the Syllabus.

*Truesdale, Al. With Cords of Love. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006.*

Optional Reading: *With Cords of Love* by Al Truesdale, chapter 9.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

## *Lesson 10*

# **A Wesleyan Response to Non-Christian Religions, Part 2**

## *Lesson Overview*

### **Schedule**

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	On Faith	Small Groups	Homework
0:30	The Christian Gospel and the Non-Christian Religions	Lecture	Resource 10-1 Resource 10-2
1:10	Student Response	Guided Discussion	
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### **Suggested Reading for Instructor**

Same as Lesson 9.

# Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

## Accountability

*In pairs have the students share their journal entries for this past week.*

*Return homework.*

## Orientation

In this lesson we will continue the discussion of the Wesleyan response to pluralism.

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- understand how Wesleyans assess the relationship between the Christian gospel and non-Christian religions
- begin to develop a basis for ministering as a Wesleyan in a world marked by religious pluralism
- be prepared to engage a communicant of a non-Christian religion in a manner that is distinctly Wesleyan

## Motivator

“Would not openness to other religions relativize the truth claims of Christianity? How can Christians be [attentive, respectful, and patient toward] persons of other faiths without undermining their own convictions not only [regarding] the validity of Christianity, but the importance of efforts to reach non-Christians with the good news of Jesus Christ? Is there any way to combine strong conviction with genuine [respect and patience]?”

*Runyon, The New Creation, 215.*

## Lesson Body

### Small Groups: On Faith

(20 minutes)

*Divide the class into groups of about 3 students each.*

In your group read each others' response papers to Wesley's sermon "On Faith."

Make comments on the thoughts and insights as presented.

As a group decide on at least two key points from the sermon.

*If time allows, have the groups share their key points.*

*How can these key points be presented to today's world?*

*Collect homework.*

### Lecture: The Christian Gospel and the Non-Christian Religions

(40 minutes)

#### Introduction

To this point we have focused on the universality of prevenient grace and the human response to it. We have said a positive response to prevenient grace establishes an anticipatory relationship with God—not to be misconstrued as an achievement of works—the goal of which is evangelical conversion. We have seen how the Wesleyan position regarding one's response to prevenient grace follows the pattern of how the gospel came to Cornelius (Acts 10: 1-48).

We believe our position is true to the universal inclusiveness of Christ's atoning work, the Holy Spirit's witness to Christ even at the most elementary levels, and the New Testament. The doctrine of prevenient grace states the anticipatory work of the Spirit and the possibility of measures of human response, while at the same time protecting the clear distinction between anticipation and the explicit disclosure of Christ the Redeemer that comes through the proclamation of the gospel. As important as it is, prevenient grace does not swallow up *evangelical conversion* as *positive, gifted response* to a full disclosure of Christ in accordance with the Scriptures.

Refer to Resource 10-1 in the Student Guide.

## Wesleyans and the Ideology of Religious Pluralism

Given the orthodox Christological affirmations Wesleyans make, the notion that the non-Christian religions are so many independent paths to God is wholly untenable. Any form of religious pluralism that deviates from Christ as the incarnate, unsubstitutable Redeemer of the world, violates Wesleyan fidelity to the Scriptures, the Apostles' Creed, and the Creeds of Nicea and Chalcedon. The same is true for any concept of redemption that depreciates the importance of an evangelical encounter with Christ that comes through proclamation of the gospel in accordance with the Scriptures, and the obedience of faith.

### An Unresolved Question

So far, we have not dealt with the question, "What is the relationship between prevenient grace and the non-Christian religions?" Let's do that now. The question carries the following implications:

- What role, if any, do those religions play in the Spirit's efforts to bring persons to repentance and new life in Christ? Are non-Christian religions grace-endowed paths to God?
- Are they vehicles God intentionally uses, and to some extent indwells, in anticipation of the proclamation and reception of the gospel?
- Does God explicitly work through non-Christian religious structures in the service of prevenient grace?
- Should non-Christian religions be recognized as preliminary servants—vehicles—of God that await the coming of the more complete Christological revelation of God?

### **Wesleyan theology, and the claim that non-Christian religions are complete religious structures that offer well-developed and autonomous *alternatives* to the Christian faith**

Looking at things from the perspective of religions other than Christian, they would *resent* the notion they are but preliminary and temporary religious space-holders awaiting their fulfillment in—or replacement by—Christ. The position stated in Lesson 9 would strike them as finally arrogant, ignorant, and oppressive, even if well-intended. Non-Christian religions would also *reject* the notion that instead of serving the "god," "God," or "gods" they name, they are actually temporarily and unknowingly serving Christ.

Refer to Resource 10-2 in the Student Guide.

While most religions make space for other religions, none of them can be reconciled with the New Testament affirmation regarding the person of Jesus Christ. None of them would proclaim the gospel of the suffering, crucified, and risen Christ. Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs, for instance, are quite willing to recognize Jesus as a great religious teacher and moral example, or even as an avatar, one of many incarnations of God. Muslims recognize Jesus to be the second greatest of the prophets and believe He was born of a virgin. Many Jews believe Jesus the Jew represents the best in Jewish piety. A rabbi friend of mine says, "Jesus was an exemplary Jewish man." But none of these religions are prepared to affirm that Jesus is the singular, unsubstitutable revelation of the Father in whom alone God has achieved redemption for all. They could not do so without ceasing to be what they are.

### **Wesleyan Inclusivism**

When compared with the various responses to religious pluralism we discussed in Lesson 3, Wesleyans are more in harmony with the *inclusivism* represented by Clark H. Pinnock, John Sanders, and Karl Rahner. They embrace doctrines of prevenient grace very similar to that of John Wesley. We are probably closer to Pinnock's position because, unlike Rahner, we do not assign a specific redemptive role to other religions. Additionally, because of our doctrine of prevenient grace, an *exclusivism*—Hendrik Kraemer, John Piper, Ronald Nash, R.C. Sproul, and Carl F.H. Henry—that puts devotees of non-Christian religions beyond the reach of preliminary grace and positive response prior to the full proclamation of the gospel is unacceptable.

### **"Christianity" and the "Kingdom of God"**

Before explicitly stating a Wesleyan answer to the question, "What is the relationship between prevenient grace and the non-Christian religions?" let's make clear that neither the kingdom of God nor the gospel of Jesus Christ are to be equated with "the Christian religion." John Wesley had seen enough distortions of the Christian gospel and enough misrepresentations of Jesus Christ to know that persons and nations that identify themselves as "Christian" can be as far away from God as overt pagans.

Such religion, Wesley judged, is "lighter than vanity itself." For Wesley "true religion" is the religion of a heart transformed by the Holy Spirit, and fully given to discipleship in the school of Jesus. True religion

*Harink, Paul Among the Postliberals, 228.*

proceeds from a life made right toward God and humanity. Wesley would have applauded Douglas Harink's statement that the apostle Paul did not ask Gentiles to embrace a new religion. He "sought not to establish a religion, but a people among other people, distinct from those other people by virtue of the specific power at work in it, the power of the God of the gospel."

Under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit, Christianity can become a medium for proclaiming the gospel—a vehicle of revelation—in a way no other religion can. But it always stands in need of reform through the Spirit. On many occasions Christianity in some of its forms has obstructed the gospel and has stood against the kingdom of God. The quality of its witness depends upon the quality of its fidelity to the Lord it names.

This delineation doesn't diminish the importance of the Church and the sacraments. But it does recognize a vital distinction between the Christian religion and vibrant life in Christ.

### **A Wesleyan Assessment of Non-Christian Religions**

What then is the relationship between the Christian gospel of redemption and the non-Christian religions?

*To begin*, we can't easily separate a person from his or her religion. The belief structures of one's religion will affect—not necessarily determine—the way he or she responds to prevenient grace. We know in many instances persons can detect shortcomings in their religions and can to varying degrees transcend those failures. Abraham, for example, left behind the religion of his fathers. The Old Testament prophets pronounced God's judgment on corrupted worship and practice. Deep religious dissatisfaction drove the Buddha to reject many of the religious ideas with which he was raised and to renounce the culture of privilege and isolation that marked his childhood. Confucius also was a reformer. Muhammad rejected the polytheism and superstition in which he was raised and called his people to worship one God.

But by-and-large, persons are shaped by the religions they inherit. At foundational, even subconscious levels, religious structures—including belief, ritual, and practice—shape the ways we see the world, assess reality, and perceive morality. For example, Buddhists and Christians view the "self" in fundamentally different ways. A Muslim, to take another example,

believes Christians are idolaters because they affirm the deity of Jesus Christ. How, they ask, can you assign deity to a human without violating the first commandment? Because of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Jews find it almost impossible to think of Christians as being faithful to the Old Testament Shema: "Hear, O Israel, The LORD our God is one LORD" (Deut 6:4, RSV). A Hindu or Sikh who believes strongly in the law of Karma will explain catastrophic events in a person's life quite differently from the way a Methodist does.

*Next*, let's answer the question directly. Given the scandal of particularity—"For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many" (Rom 5:15)—and the uncompromising importance of evangelical faith, is there a Wesleyan standard for assessing non-Christian religions? "Yes."

The standard comes in the form of a question, "To what extent does the religion in question serve the purposes of prevenient grace? In what ways does it promote a 'righteousness' that approximates the 'faith of a servant'?" In some of their features, some religions better serve the goal of prevenient grace than others. Some religions—more correctly, some forms of some religions—suggest rough parallels to important features of the Christian faith, and hence may better serve prevenient grace.

Let's take note of just two examples.

1. The god Amitabha—known to the Chinese as A-mi-t'o and to the Koreans and Japanese as Amida—is one of a class of savior-beings in Mahayana Buddhism. Like other savior-beings, Amitabha dwells in the heavens and actively ministers to humankind's needs. He is one of the great gods of Asia. He presides over the Western Paradise named Sukhavati, of the Land of Bliss generally known as "the Pure Land." By grace alone, and out of kindly love, Amitabha freely admits into the Pure Land all who beseech him in faith. He thereby insures by grace alone future bliss for all those who cannot achieve it by their own merits. Some sects among the Chinese and Japanese believe Amitabha grants the fullness of his grace to all who will repeat his name in complete faith and devotion. So, faith in Amitabha, quite apart from meritorious works and deeds, is alone sufficient for salvation.

2. Without doubt, one of the greatest expressions of selfless love for the salvation of others is displayed in the Bodhisattvas. Buddhists teach that all of us are Buddhas—enlightened ones—in the making. According to Mahayana Buddhism, Bodhisattvas constitute a great host of supernatural beings who hear prayers and come actively to humankind's aid. The belief is—especially in China and Japan—that in many existences these beings made vows to become Buddhas. They have acquired almost inexhaustible stores of merit. Their righteousness is so great they could readily achieve the full status of Buddhas and pass into Nirvana. But out of love and pity for all humankind and all sentient beings, they have refused to claim Nirvana for themselves. Instead, they have postponed their entrance into Nirvana and have “selflessly” transferred to those who call upon them in prayer or give devotional thought to them. Perhaps the most popular Bodhisattva is Lord Avalokita, Avalokitesvara, the personification of divine compassion. He has become incarnate over 300 times to save those in peril of moral catastrophes, folly, rage, lust, disasters, and physical pain. The “selfless” love the Bodhisattvas demonstrate is a love to which you and I are called. We too, even now, out of selfless love, can vow that we shall never enter Nirvana until every sentient being in the whole world is set free from the enslaving “selfishness” that afflicts the unenlightened.

John Wesley would know how to appraise these accounts from a non-Christian religion in authentically *Christocentric* ways.

*John B. Noss, Man's Religions  
(Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc,  
1974), 155-158.*

Not all Buddhists adhere to these instances of Mahayana Buddhism. They help us see why we have to make important distinctions between the religions, and the diversity within any given religion.

Here is the conclusion: *The value of a non-Christian religion resides not in what it claims for itself, but in its capacity for instrumental service to God's prevenient grace.* To that extent alone, its positive features should be identified as authored, through the Holy Spirit, by the prevenient Christ. Any measure of compatibility between the Christian faith and a non-Christian religion should be seen as the result of prevenient grace active in the fluid interchange between a culture—no matter how ancient—and a religion. The similarity doesn't spring principally from the religion itself, but from God's grace.

By these criteria, we may speak positively of some features of certain religions. But we must recognize those features to be preliminary, impermanent, and anticipatory. They are secondary and strictly instrumental. Never should we overlook the ways in which religions—including Christianity—are contrary to the God who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth.

## Conclusion

We should remind ourselves that how God will judge a person with reference to his or her response to Jesus Christ rests with the sovereign God of Holy Love alone. In all instances He will be faithful to himself, to His word, and to His world. Furthermore, anything John Wesley or any of his theological descendents might teach regarding the relationship between the Christian faith and non-Christian religions must be placed under the scrutiny of the New Testament. If Wesley is found to be in any way out of harmony with the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, then Wesley and all those who accept theological guidance from him are subject to correction.

Let us also remember that while the Church is the advance guard and instance of the kingdom of God, neither the Church nor the Christian religion are synonymous with the Kingdom. Not until the Son has completed all the Father has assigned to Him can all the borders, lines, and colors of the Kingdom become perfectly clear. "Then comes the end, when Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. . . . When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one" (1 Cor 15:24-25, 28, RSV).

## Guided Discussion: Student Response

(15 minutes)

*Allow for discussion and response.*

*Challenge the students to defend their responses.*

*Challenge them to think deeper than simple answers.*

*Is the Wesleyan response to religious pluralism not guilty of religious oppression—recall the error of "totalizing"?*

Defend against the charge that the Wesleyan response to religious pluralism falls victim to:

- Pelagianism
- works righteousness
- blunting the needs for Christian missions
- blurring the lines between evangelical conversion and being devoted to a non-Christian religion

# Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

## Review

*Call on students to respond.*

*What one point stands out to you from this lesson?*

## Assign Homework

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

Read John Wesley's sermon "A Caution Against Bigotry," Resource 10-3. Or you may go to <http://gbgm-umc.org/umhistory/weslew/sermons/serm-106.stm>. Write a 1- to 2-page response paper.

Continue working on your credo.

*Truesdale, Al. With Cords of Love. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006.*

Optional Reading: *With Cords of Love* by Al Truesdale, chapter 10.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions in the Syllabus. Also, respond to the Motivator.

## *Lesson 11*

# Communicating the Gospel in a Religiously Pluralistic World

## *Lesson Overview*

### **Schedule**

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:10	A Caution against Bigotry	Small Groups	Homework
0:30	Communicating the Gospel in a Religiously Pluralistic World	Lecture	Resource 11-1 Resource 11-2 Resource 11-3
1:10	Student Response	Guided Discussion	
1:25	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

### **Suggested Reading for Instructor**

McGrath, Alister. *The Twilight of Atheism*. New York: Doubleday, 2004.

Truesdale, Al. *With Cords of Love*. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006. Chapters 11, 12 & 13.

# Lesson Introduction

(10 minutes)

## Accountability

*Call on students to share a selection from their journals.*

*Return homework.*

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- appreciate and embrace the qualities required of a Christian minister—with specific reference to the Wesleyan tradition—in a religiously pluralistic world
- understand and embrace biblical principles for communicating the gospel in a religiously pluralistic world
- understand how to communicate the gospel in a pluralistic world

## Motivator

John Fischer tells of attending a “birthday bash” at the Starplex amphitheater in Dallas. The partygoers were there to celebrate the anniversary of a local alternative rock station. On that summer night the smoke from tobacco “and some other leaves” hung low. One Christian group—Jars of Clay—was the only Christian group to appear. The man next to Fischer had five earrings on his face, only two of which were on his ears. As Fischer looked out over the crowd, six young men—Jars of Clay—slipped onstage and began to sing, “Arms nailed down, are you telling me something?” Fischer said to himself, “We’ve waited a long time for this.”

Noticing Fischer’s backstage pass, the man with the facial jewelry asked Fischer, “Are you with Jars?” “Yes,” Fischer answered. The man continued, “If you’re going to see them afterwards, would you thank them for me? I became a Christian listening to their CD. I played it over and over and figured out just about everything. I went and got a Christian friend of mine—pulled him out of a party—and told him I wanted to get saved right away. He didn’t believe me. You wouldn’t have either. I hated Christians.”

*John Fischer, Fearless Faith: Living Beyond the Walls of “Safe” Christianity (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 221-23.*

## Lesson Body

### Small Groups: A Caution against Bigotry

(20 minutes)

*Divide the class into groups of about 3 students each.*

In your group read each others' response papers to Wesley's sermon "A Caution Against Bigotry."

Make comments on the thoughts and insights as presented.

As a group decide on at least two key points from the sermon.

*If time allows, have the groups report.*

*How can these key points be presented to today's world?*

### Lecture: Communicating the Gospel in a Religiously Pluralistic World

(40 minutes)

*This lesson states the various elements, but does not develop each one extensively. The lesson calls for considerable reflection and prayer. The material should not be dealt with quickly. If more than one lesson session is needed, then time should be taken. It is important that discussion involve all members of the class and that each person engage in serious personal reflection.*

In any age, no higher privilege can be extended to a human than that of declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ. In this lesson we will examine three dimensions of proclamation:

1. the Christian minister in a religiously pluralistic world
2. biblical principles for communicating the gospel in a religiously pluralistic world
3. communicating the gospel in a pluralistic world

#### The Christian Minister in a Religiously Pluralistic World

What qualities and skills should characterize the Christian minister as he or she communicates the gospel in a pluralistic world?

- **A Christian minister must first have been grasped by the glory and power of the Christian gospel.**

*Refer to Resource 11-1 in the Student Guide.*

*Give personal examples where possible for this lecture.*

*Ask students for examples.*

The gospel must have become his or her consuming passion. This must be evident in his or her life and thought. A love for the gospel must translate into the way he or she lives in his or her family, community, and in the Church. The appeal of the beggarly elements of this world must have been replaced by the

surpassing glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. And, he or she must have an integrity grounded in the character of God.

The apostle Paul said, "I believed, and so I spoke" (2 Cor 4:13).

- **A Christian minister must be a diligent student of the gospel.**

The gospel is never mastered; it must repeatedly master us. A person satisfied with a minimal knowledge of and interest in the gospel—in all the things of God—is unworthy of the Christian ministry. He or she must be a diligent student of the Holy Scriptures, not simply to the extent one prepares sermons for public presentation, but as an ardent student.

One of the greatest temptations any of us in the Christian ministry face—regardless of one's denomination—is to become a "hireling," that is, to preach a gospel tailored by the surrounding culture. "Hirelings" and "stewards" are of two different orders. A Christian minister has ceased being a bearer of the *euangelion* of God—the gospel—when he or she crafts his or her preaching, pastoral leadership, and vision of the Church in the world as inoffensive to the powers of this age: consumerism, nationalism, racism, gender worship, and so forth.

By the power of the Pentecostal Spirit, and by faithfully following the way of the Cross, a minister of Christ can bear witness to "the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24).

- **A Christian minister must be a curious person.**

By curious we mean he or she must have a lively interest in broadly learning about all things that bear upon effectively communicating the gospel in a pluralistic and postmodern world. The complexity of the world requires this. The powers of evil in our world will not have much to fear from a dull minister satisfied with minimal curiosity and minimal learning. Learn from other persons; learn from a broad range of books and magazines that challenge one's comfort zone; learn from seminars offered in one's community—the university, the community college, etc.—and the world of opportunities goes on. For those who have access to the Internet, opportunities for continuous and broad learning are almost unlimited.

*"Euangelion" is a transliteration of a Greek word that means "glad tidings" or "good or joyful news" hence, "gospel." Literally it transliterates euaglelion (eu-ag-gel-i-on). From this word comes the Anglo-Saxon "god-spell"—the gospel.*

Few persons can become authorities on all the world's religions, but it seems imperative that a Christian minister have at least a working knowledge of them. There are excellent introductory texts. An older text Dr. Truesdale continues to find most helpful is John B. Noss, *Man's Religions*, Macmillan, 1974. It can be purchased (used) quite inexpensively from [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

An alert Christian minister should also try to become as familiar as possible with the newer religious options that range far beyond the traditional religions. One need not invest large amounts of money to do this. The Links page of *the Pluralism Project of Harvard University* is a goldmine of resources. The site is available at <http://www.pluralism.org/resources/links/index.php>.

- **A Christian minister must be a student of the world.**

The theologian Karl Barth said he had to learn how to preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. If one attempts to proclaim the gospel in the absence of being a student of the world, then he or she may likely not connect with his or her hearers. One may only succeed in hurling the gospel into the world the way one hurls a rock through a window.

Opportunities for being a student of the world differ from one person to another and from one location to another. We should be careful not to make expectations of persons they simply cannot fill. Some persons have better access to news media, to libraries, and to computer technology than others. This just needs to be recognized. However, in full accordance with the opportunities for learning one has, his or her responsibility to the gospel is clear: become a student of the social, educational, popular, political, religious, economic, and technological currents at play in the world.

For those who have some access to the Internet, a wealth of good resources for being a student of the world is available. Books, newspapers, newsweeklies, book and movie reviews, and assessments of popular culture abound. If you wish to receive a list of some informative Internet resources send, a request to [altruesdale@islc.net](mailto:altruesdale@islc.net).

*Allow for response.*

*Which of these areas will be the biggest challenge for you?*

*What can you do to make progress?*

*Refer to Resource 11-2 in the Student Guide.*

## **Principles That Should Govern Communication of the Gospel in a Religiously Pluralistic World**

### **1. Know what the gospel is.**

Describing features of Jesus' life is not the "good news." Nor should pushing one's denomination in Jesus' name ever pass as the gospel. One must know why the gospel is "the gospel of God." A seminary professor was fond of asking seminary seniors as they sat for their comprehensive examinations that would qualify them for graduation, "What is the gospel?" Numerous students who had taken all of the courses still could not present a simple and clear statement of the gospel.

In *A New Kind of Christian* Neo Oliver issues a stinging indictment that is probably overstated, but nevertheless warrants a careful hearing: "One of the ways modernity captured Christianity was in [the] area of mission: our mission evaporated (except in the narrow slice of church life that we called 'missions'. . .) We became purveyors of religious goods and services, seeking clientele, competing for market share, complete with brand names and all the rest. If you want useful plastic kitchen articles, you go to Wal-Mart. If you want low-cost, high-fat food in generous portions, you go to Taco Bell. If you want a standard, scripted vacation, you go to Disney World. If you want a fizzy, sugary drink, you go to Coca-Cola. And if you want a spiritual pick-me-up, you go to church. This put us in a situation exactly opposite to—as I see it—Christ's intent."

*McLaren, 156.*

### **2. The gospel is first of all "good news" about God and about what God has done for the redemption of humankind, the creation, and commissioning the Church to herald God's salvation.**

### **3. The relationship between the old and new covenants must be made clear.**

What is the relation of the earthly life and ministry of Jesus to the activity of God and faith of Israel prior to Jesus' birth? The herald must understand and tell how all God's purposes for Israel, the nations, and the creation are fulfilled in God's Messiah (2 Cor 21:19-22 and 1 Pet 1:10-12). Jesus Christ is the Israel of God.

**4. One must clearly understand what it means to call Jesus “the Christ”—Messiah—of God. Why do we call him the Redeemer?**

Three very helpful books that address this subject, and can be purchased through Internet used bookstores, are: Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (John Knox, 1974); Emil Brunner, *The Mediator* (Westminster Press, 1934); and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus* (Harper, 1999). See [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com).

**5. The gospel is meant for all persons everywhere.**

This means no persons, regardless of their sinful past and regardless of the powers that enslave them, are excluded from the promise of New creation by the Spirit.

**6. The gospel of redemption is purely the gift of God’s grace.**

Neither human accomplishments nor pride of place, face, or race contribute anything to redemption. In fact, bringing any of these forward for recognition only frustrates the work of God’s grace.

**7. The herald must recognize how the Spirit of God has already prepared the way for telling the Good News.**

In prevenient grace, God has been “evangelizing” long before the human messenger arrives. The herald should seek to discern the preparation the Spirit has already accomplished in the person to whom the gospel is spoken.

Pastor Dan, in *A New Kind of Christian*, tells of a conversation he had with a young woman after addressing a group composed mostly of college students. The young woman told him, “I want to serve God somehow with my life. I think at heart I’m like a missionary or something. But here’s what I know: whenever I get to know individual non-Christians—I mean really get to know them—I am completely convinced that I find God already there and at work in their lives. It doesn’t matter if they’re way-out New Agers or even atheists. So it’s clear to me that God doesn’t limit himself to working in Christians’ lives. We try to serve God, but we don’t own him. . . .” “Christianity,” she was convinced, “doesn’t own God.”

McLaren, 140.

## **8. Recognize the difference between “witnessing” and “convincing.”**

By the power of the Spirit, all Christians are called to “witness” to what Jesus Christ has accomplished in their lives. But Christians are not called to “convince” anyone that Jesus is the Christ. As the New Testament makes clear, “convincing” is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. Persons who ignore this important distinction have done great harm. Just because a person bears witness does not mean a hearer has, in the gospel sense, “heard” the witness. True “hearing” and “convincing” is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The minister who understands and supports the singular work of the Holy Spirit must be patient, and must wait for the prevenient work of the Spirit to mature until the point at which “hearing” is possible. If a person “hears”—because the Holy Spirit has enlightened him or her—then the hearer must come to grips with the Holy Spirit, not with human arguments that can be set aside as oppressive.

A “witness” must learn to be discerning.

## **Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World**

How does one communicate the gospel in a pluralistic world? Paul’s testimony in 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 can provide a good answer to our question. His statement is as instructive today as it was in the first century.

Early in the Christian Church there appeared persons who saw they could profit by twisting the gospel to suit their own carnal interests. For them, desecrating the message of the Cross and Resurrection was a small price to pay for personal gain. So in the interest of personal benefit they put their sinful imaginations to work.

The apostle Paul knew these charlatans were at work. In the power of the Spirit, he fought efforts to distort the gospel. Time and again he contrasted his proclamation of the gospel with the opportunists who like wolves had crept into the Church.

In that context, Paul delivered a message every faithful minister of the gospel should digest. It has three parts.

*Refer to Resource 11-3 in the Student Guide.*

**1. One who communicates the gospel in a pluralistic world must recognize that he or she is a steward, not an owner.**

That one speaks for God, not for himself or herself. The gospel belongs to God, not to the one who proclaims it. The one who proclaims, Paul says, has a ministry “by God’s mercy” (4:1). Who is this God? He is “the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6).

All of this means God determines what the gospel is, not finite humankind. The one who proclaims must not alter the gospel in any way. We will be judged by the faithfulness we show as stewards of the gospel.

One of the major tests a steward must face, and pass, is: does he or she represent oneself or one’s master? Paul knew the imposters were only using the name of Jesus to “preach themselves.” What sacrilege! What blasphemy! That a person would use the name of the Redeemer as a device for advancing themselves, their own cause, and their own ecclesiastical advancement. Upon such a one the judgment of God will surely be visited in the day of reckoning. But Paul had slain that dragon: “For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake” (4:5).

**2. One who understands that he or she speaks in the name of the righteous God will have nothing to do with deceit or clever devices for heralding the Good News.**

The very manner in which the gospel is proclaimed must itself reveal the character of God. One is astonished by how often men and women with carnal minds reach for deceitful ways as a means for speaking about God. They seem to think the “end justifies the means.” They fail to see that their methods undercut the gospel they preach. Paul said, “We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God’s word” (4:2).

**3. As has always been true, and is certainly true in a pluralistic world, the one who hopes rightly to bear witness to the gospel must place oneself in the service of justice and mercy in the world.**

Neo Oliver is correct

When it comes to other religions, the challenge in modernity was to prove that we're right and they're wrong. But I think we have a different challenge in postmodernity. The question isn't so much whether we're right but whether we're good. And it strikes me that goodness, not just rightness, is what Jesus said the real issue was—you know, good trees produce good fruit, that sort of thing. If we Christians would take all the energy we put into proving we're right and others are wrong, and invested that energy in pursuing and doing good, somehow I think that more people would believe we are right.

McLaren, 61.

Drawing on Isaiah 61: 1-2; 58: 6, Jesus in the Gospel of Luke interprets His ministry as the fulfillment of the eschatological Jubilee (Lev 25). This is a key for understanding and receiving the age of salvation. Hence, the ministry of Jesus and the age of salvation are marked by "release." In Luke, release occurs in three forms:

- release from diabolical power, so people are healed—Luke 13: 10-17; Acts 10: 38
- release from the debilitating cycle of debt by which those of higher status and greater means control the lives of those without power and privilege— Luke 6: 27-36
- "release" or "forgiveness" of sins—Luke 7: 47-49

In Jesus' first recorded public sermon He proclaimed the *good news* by saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk 4: 18-19, RSV).

Loving mercy and doing justice as "good news" is the form of "apologetics" by which the Wesleyan tradition is best identified. We are tailored to agree with Neo.

**4. The one who would faithfully herald the Good News in a pluralistic world must place his or her total trust in the wisdom, timing, and power of God, and not in manipulation, one's own impulsiveness, or privileges associated with power of any kind.**

That the gospel is for all persons everywhere does not mean devices of force and intimidation should be employed to win them. "Conversions" that occur as the

result of force or intimidation—whether by the power of the state, economic pressure, or military force—bring shame upon the precious name of Jesus Christ. A “minister” who has not yet renounced “violence” and “oppression” as contrary to the gospel is still an enemy of the Cross, not its emissary.

Paul said only the Holy Spirit can convince a person of the gospel’s truth, and He does so making the gospel far more attractive to a person than anything that attracted him or her before. When from within the depths of person he or she confesses, “My Lord and my God,” the gospel has succeeded through persuasion, not through coercion.

The charge that the Christian faith is a “totalizing,” oppressive religion is true only if the Christian faith is either misunderstood or misrepresented. The gospel of Jesus Christ does make universal promises to and claims upon all persons. But the claims are to be pressed by the Holy Spirit, not by a coercive Church or preacher. The uses of coercion or deceit are “shameful ways” that cannot represent the Messiah, who will not break the bruised reed or quench the dimly burning wick (Isa 42: 3).

A question every Christian minister must ask is, “Do I have sufficient confidence in the Holy Spirit to make the gospel attractive to those who hear the good news? Do I have confidence in the gospel?” One who resorts to coercion of any kind thereby reveals for all to see that he or she does not trust the Holy Spirit, does not trust the gospel. He or she also shows they do not respect and do not love the persons to whom they speak.

If one is to effectively communicate the gospel in a pluralistic world, one must be able to affirm with the apostle Paul, “We do not lose heart. We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God’s word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God” (2 Cor 4: 1-2).

## **Conclusion**

Who is sufficient for the responsibility we have explored in this lesson, and in this module? No one! Left to themselves, only fools or charlatans would not flee the Christian ministry. But praise be to God! The sufficiency is not from us. Through the centuries many Christian ministers have claimed for themselves the

Lord's promise to the apostle Paul: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." We may also embrace Paul's response: "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:9-10, RSV).

## **Guided Discussion: Student Response**

(15 minutes)

*Lead the students in a most somber discussion of the question.*

*What are the conditions under which a person should consider entering the Christian ministry?*

*What are the means available to a minister for understanding the broader culture in which he or she ministers?*

## Lesson Close

(5 minutes)

### Review

*Do you have any questions or comments concerning this lesson?*

### Assign Homework

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

Interview two clergypersons and two laypersons you respect, preferably from different denominations. Ask them to describe the character of the Christian minister they believe effective Christian ministry will require. Write a 2- to 3-page paper.

Complete module assignments as described in the Syllabus—interviews and credo—page 12.

*Truesdale, Al. With Cords of Love. Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006.*

Optional Reading: *With Cords of Love* by Al Truesdale, chapters 11, 12 and 13.

Write in your journal. Follow the instructions as described in the Syllabus. Also, reflect on the Motivator.

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## *Lesson 12*

# Student Accountability

## *Lesson Overview*

### **Schedule**

Start Time	Task or Topic	Learning Activity	Materials Needed
0:00	Introduction	Orient	Student Guide
0:20	Non-Christian Religions	Class Activity	Homework
0:50	Credo	Small Groups	Homework
1:20	Lesson Close	Review, Assign	Student Guide

# Lesson Introduction

(20 minutes)

## Accountability

*Ask each student to read his or her report on the character of the Christian minister from the interviews.*

*Spend time with the students in serious consideration of what they learned from the interviews.*

*Return homework.*

*Make arrangements for returning the last homework assignments.*

## Learner Objectives

*Instruct students to locate objectives in the Student Guide.*

*Restating the objectives for the learners serves as an advanced organizer for the lesson and alerts learners to key information and concepts.*

By the end of this lesson, participants should

- identify characteristics of a Christian minister that are essential for effective ministry
- explore and understand how adherents to some non-Christian religions view religious pluralism
- explain how they will minister as orthodox Christians and Wesleyans in a religiously pluralistic world

## Motivator

“The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2: 11-13).

## *Lesson Body*

### **Class Activity: Non-Christian Religions**

(30 minutes)

*You will be calling on each of the students to report their findings from the interviews conducted as part of the module requirements.*

*You may want to group the reports and have all reports about the same religion given together.*

*If time allows, give opportunity for questions and discussion.*

*Collect the reports at the end of this section.*

### **Small Groups: Credo**

(30 minutes)

*Divide the class into groups of about 3 students each.*

*If there is time, have each group report on the significant thoughts that came out of the credos.*

*Collect homework.*

In your group read each others' credos.

Ask each other questions—get to the heart of what each of you think and believe.

# Lesson Close

(10 minutes)

## Review

*Call on each of the students.*

*What is the most powerful thing you learned from this module that you will take into your ministry?*

## Assign Homework

*Direct students to the Homework Assignments in the Student Guide.*

Commit to communicating the gospel—Christ—to a lost world.

Have a passion for reaching out to the lost.

Allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through you, that God be glorified.

Be Christlike in all your life and ministry.

## Closing

*Pray for each of the students and their ministry.*