

Missionary Encounters with Other Faiths

The Posture of a Missionary Encounter

Summary

Christian View of Religion

1. Reality of Pluralism
2. Religion is not simply practices and beliefs but a comprehensive system that will shape everything and strongly influence your behavior. "Culture is religion made visible." Michael Goheen
3. It is not a matter of taste, religion involves truth claims.

Approaches to Engaging Other Faiths

A. Liberal Uniting

1. Simple dialogue: It is tempting to approach different faiths in terms of dialogue. You can learn from me and I can learn from you. Yet, this denies the truth claims that both faiths are arguing from.
2. "All religions are one "This view not only undermines our faith but demeans the truth claims of others

B. Fundamentalist Clash

1. Other religions are evil
2. Our approach must reject and condemn
3. While we do need to make strong distinctions between our faith and another, we are also called to evangelize all nations. Clashing with other faiths, simply calling them to repent will not faithfully

C. A Missionary Encounter

1. Being a **Sympathetic Insider**: Getting to the Heart of...
 - Islam**: longing for moral order, worshipping a God of justice, following a life of discipline.
 - Hinduism**: longing for an answer to inequality in the world, a deep respect for life, a desire for justice
 - Buddhism**: longing for an answer to suffering, seeking self-improvement and avoidance of unhealthy desire, embracing mystery
 - Judaism**: longing for identity, celebrating a cultural tradition and protective against things that would dilute that.
 - Fulfillment**: Christianity fulfills these longings in deeper and more satisfying ways than their religion.

2. Being a ***Critical Outsider***:
 - i. The way these faiths seek to fulfill these longings is a fundamental distortion of the truth
 - ii. Gospel differs dramatically:
 - a. Grace is radically different from a works-based system
 - b. Creation is good, but fallen and ultimately is being redeemed
 - c. God is sovereign and personal. He reveals himself.
 - iii. A missionary encounter must not simply insert Jesus into another religion and be the same. It requires subverting.
3. A missionary encounter then practices subversive fulfillment: addressing the heart longings while overturning the ways that other religions seek to mete this out.

What does this encounter look like in the real world (i.e. not in an academic environment)?

Posture of a Missionary Encounter

A. Engaging the Individual

1. We must be, in the first place, human beings. We all live in the same world.
2. Simple human problems are a great way to begin this type of conversation. Universal problems are in the background of all religions and evangelism comes out of the discussions of ordinary human life.
 - Shared values that you can affirm together or bemoan together
 - Talk about your kids and challenges of parenting
 - The education system
 - Consumer culture
3. You may find that they don't believe everything other adherents of their faith believe (Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, etc.). You may talk about their beliefs and realize that they have many idiosyncrasies that would change your approach. So, you may want to ask, "What is *their* longing?"

B. Living Faithful and Contrary

1. We must not undermine our own faith by appearing beholden to the idolatries of Western culture.
2. It is not a call to sinlessness, but rather the ability to clearly identify what is sin and what is faithful. Our morality is not on trial, if it were we'd undermine the very grace based message of the gospel.
3. How is the gospel "working"?
 - It isn't providing success or happiness the way the world considers it
 - It will however provide deep satisfaction and flourishing in all areas of life.

C. Gospel-Centered, Non-coercive invitation

1. The gospel is alternative, universalist, and counter. Therefore, ultimately, it is a call for repentance.
2. But it is a non-coercive invitation. We cannot force people to believe the gospel. It is a work of the Spirit. Conversions nominally given don't count. This means that we have to be tolerant of unbelief. If someone rejects the gospel, we may still evangelize and pray for them but we need to be careful to keep it in the invitation form (not coercing them to believe).
3. Yet, we have a call to speak the gospel and communicate it in a way that is understandable and intelligible. This means tuning in to the longings and vernacular of the people we seek to reach.