

David Hamstra :: God Series

What is your biggest problem with Christianity?

Summed up: Exclusivity

“There can’t be just one true religion.”

Why can’t we all just get along? Because of the divisiveness or potential divisiveness of religion many civic and cultural leaders around have tried to address this concern.

One attempt has been to outlaw it.

Soviet Russia, Communist China, Khmer Rouge, in a different way Nazi Germany determined to tightly control religious practice in an effort to stop it from dividing society or eroding the power of the state.

Tragic irony of this was noted by Alister McGrath in his history of atheism:

“The 20th Century gave rise to one of the greatest and most distressing paradoxes of human history: that the greatest intolerance and violence of that century were practiced by those who believed that religion caused intolerance and violence.”

Secularization thesis has now become largely discredited. Through human evolution we once needed religion to cope with a very frightening, incomprehensible world. Science would help us understand and control our environment. Religion would diminish. In reality, all religions are growing in adherents around the world. Korea has gone from 1% to 40% Christian, etc...

The other option is condemn religion.

Doctrinal differences are insignificant and superficial between Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. “Coexist”

-People see God as all loving spirit in the universe.

Insistence that doctrine doesn’t matter is really a doctrine itself. It holds a specific view of God which is touted as superior and more enlightened, doing the very thing they forbid others to do.

“Each religion sees part of spiritual truth but none can see the whole truth.”

-Chicken soup for the soul

Blindman elephant story which on the surface is very humble.

The story is told from the point of view of someone who is not blind.

“There is an appearance of humility in the protestation that the truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp, but if this is used to invalidate all claims to discern the truth it is in fact an arrogant claim to a kind of knowledge which is superior to all others.”

How could you possibly know that no one religion can see the whole truth unless you yourself have the superior, comprehensive knowledge of spiritual reality you just claimed that none of the religions have?

“Religious belief is too culturally and historically conditioned to be the truth”

Everyone belongs to a community that reinforces the plausibility of some beliefs and discourages others.

Dawkins response to a question, “What if you are wrong?”

If you infer from the social conditionness of all belief that “no belief can be held as universally true for everyone,” that itself is a comprehensive claim about everyone that is the product of social conditions. So it cannot be true, on its own terms.

“Relativity relativizes itself” Berger

Plantinga puts it this way, “If you were born in Morocco, you wouldn’t ever be a Christian, but rather a Muslim.”

Suppose we concede that if I had been born of Muslim parents in Morocco rather than Christian parents in Michigan, my beliefs would have been quite different. But the same goes for the pluralist. If the pluralist had been born in Morocco he probably wouldn’t be a pluralist. Does it follow that his pluralist beliefs are produced in him by an unreliable belief producing process.

You can’t say “All claims about religions are historically conditioned except the one I am making right now.”

We must still do the hard work of asking:

Which affirmations about God, human nature, and spiritual reality are true and which are false?

We will have to base our life on some answer to that question.