THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Communicating the Gospel in a Pluralistic World

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SESSION 1

The Various Meanings and a
Brief History of Pluralism

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

DISCIPLESHIPPLACE.ORG

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The Various Meanings and a Brief History of Pluralism

SESSION OVERVIEW

Pluralism Defined

Historical Overview

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

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

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

- 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

The Various Meanings and a Brief History of Pluralism

INTRODUCTION

"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

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 titled, "Democracy Versus the Melting Pot," argued that the melting pot ideal is inherently antidemocratic. 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.

PLURALISM DEFINED

One of the most prominent challenges the Christian faith faces today is religious pluralism. 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 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 does not mean there was ever a time when Christians could simply dismiss other religions, or 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. Because 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 because 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 US is commonplace. Beyond the presence of such traditional religions, we are witnessing an explosion of new religious forms, as well as a revival of ancient practices such as Wicca. 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. However, 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.

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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 the 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.

This module is predicated upon the conviction that Christ is present to 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.

DEFINITIONS

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. Let us consider three forms of pluralism besides religious pluralism. The three are political pluralism, cultural 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 to protect a free exercise of many religious practices. No religion receives from the state a privileged status above others.

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. Cultural pluralism is in evidence in the public schools of the United States. An Executive Committee Report of the National Education Association reveals one out of three elementary and secondary school students in the US 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, set of virtues, or code of behavior to which all persons ought to conform.

Religious Pluralism

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 US is the most religiously diverse nation on earth. Religions in the United States include:

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

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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. Used in this sense (and as embraced by many religious), pluralism asserts there is no religious metanarrative (or transcendent truth), only many smaller narratives (each with their own truth). 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 as 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.

From this perspective any religion that claims to possess the narrative for all persons, and that tries to proselytize accordingly, ought 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 does not 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.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

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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.

THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

The world into which the gospel came was religiously old. The Greco-Roman world was religiously diverse. In some 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 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. 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 the same.

Their Hellenistic environment influenced the Apostle Paul, the second-century apologists, and the Early Church fathers. 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 is a way of referring to the close relationship between the 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. However, 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. 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 the controversy between John of Damascus (c. 700-753), a Christian official at the court of the Muslim khalif Abdul Malek, and the Western Church over the use of icons. Yet 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 Western Christians victimized Jews, Muslims, and many Eastern Christians. 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.

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 both 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 the16th-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 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, Berkely, Hume, and Leibniz were just a few of the significant philosophers of the Enlightenment.

The Age of Reason was the first major and mature phase of modernity. Therefore, 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. Other Enlightenment figures believed enlightenment and Christianity could be made compatible (in Deism, for example), even though that often entailed major modifications to orthodox Christian belief.

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. 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 a book by Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament.*

ENLIGHTENMENT RIVER

Numerous currents formed the Enlightenment River. Following are some of the most important ones.

Middles Ages to Renaissance. 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.

Protestant Reformation. 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.

Age of Exploration. The Age of Exploration followed the close of the Middle Ages. Exploration brought Westerners more and more into contact with religions and cultures of Asia. However, 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.

Emerging Sciences. Another part of the Enlightenment River was 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.

- 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,* translated a 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 an understanding of humankind that would complement the science of nature. It included a dominant skepticism concerning any kind of religious faith.

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 even whole nations hopelessly divided. 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.

Great Lisbon Earthquake. 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.

Age of Reason. 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. Eventually, reason would call into question the claims to finality and universality that Christianity had made from the beginning.

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 us the *verum factum*—roughly, just the facts principle. He stipulated one could 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.

The form of historicism that contributed most to the emergence of the ideology of religious pluralism was reductionistic (nothing but or nothing more than). 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 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, 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. Had 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. Belief in all transcendent and ultimate sources/realities dead-ends in history.

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.

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 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, 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:

1. In the West, an accelerated and indigenous growth of interest occurred 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 US 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 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 attracted greater attention to Islam.

3. The magnificent success of Japanese economics was followed by that of Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. All of this increased Western recognition of Eastern cultures and religions.

4. There was 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, 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 a 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 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. 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.

CONCLUSION

Traditional Christian faith now finds itself in an age of pluralism. The cultural assumptions resist the claims of a Christ and a gospel that transcend any particular culture or time. Addressing every culture and every time, the Church will need to find ways to effectively proclaim the gospel which proclaims that Jesus is the only way.

APPLICATION

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1. Spend some time exploring various internet sites for the word "pluralism."

2. Write a reflection paper based on the following questions. Be prepared to share that paper with your mentor.

   - In what ways do you think pluralism is a positive idea? How can it be helpful?

   - How does the classic Christian faith conflict with pluralism?

   - What did you read in the session that was most helpful to you in understanding pluralism and why?

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EXAM

> **+ NOTES**

1. The Enlightenment of the 18th century is also called the Age of Reason.
    A. True
    B. False

2. Historicism considers the Christian Faith on the basis of human history alone.
    A. True
    B. False

3. The Church of the Nazarene is not committed to what the apostolic tradition claims about the person and work of Christ.
    A. True
    B. False

4. Christianity is compatible with cultural pluralism.
    A. True
    B. False

5. The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century ended Rome's religious monopoly in the West and prompted the rise of nationalism.
    A. True
    B. False

6. David Barrett, editor of the *World Christian Encyclopedia*, has identified _____ distinct religions in the world.
    A. 120
    B. 440
    C. 2,000
    D. 9,900

7. The internet enhances communication but is not really affecting how different cultures interact.
    A. True
    B. False

8. The Age of Reason called into question the claims of historic Christianity.
    A. True
    B. False

9. Religious pluralism rejects evangelism as oppressive.
   A. True
   B. False

10. Beginning with Emperor Constantine Christianity had favored status in the Roman Empire.
    A. True
    B. False

11. Historicism affirms pluralism by understanding all religious traditions as products of particular cultures and their history.
    A. True
    B. False

12. The Wesleyan tradition does not value reason as a resource for faith.
    A. True
    B. False

13. The development of science offered a new source of authority; empirical knowledge, gained by observing the real world.
    A. True
    B. False

14. Pluralism reflects the belief that there is no single way things ought to be.
    A. True
    B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Review the exam questions and answers. Discuss any issues or questions they raise for you.

2. In what ways do you think pluralism is a positive idea? How can it be helpful?

3. How does the classic Christian faith conflict with pluralism?

4. What did you read in the session that was most helpful to you in understanding pluralism?