

A Way to think as a 21st Century Christian

(Session 4) Syncretism

Lecture outline:

1. Set the scene by comparing law of non-contradiction with the system of dialectical reasoning.
2. Define Syncretism
3. Give a description of how syncretism has been able to develop over more than a century.
4. Give five reasons why Syncretism is problematic

1. Non-contradiction and the dialectical system

Law of Non-contradiction/ Dialectical System

Either/Or = Law of non-contradiction

Both/And = Dialectical System

My Goal:

What I want to show you this evening is that in an age where syncretism is gaining ascendancy both within and without the Church, that this is a dialectical system. However, the only way Christianity can remain coherent is by employing the principle of non-contradiction

2. Definition of Syncretism:

the combining of teachings, practices and/or doctrines from different and apparently contradictory religious traditions to create a new interpretation of an existing tradition or a new religious movement.

3. Give a description of how syncretism has been able to develop over more than a century:

Swami Vivekananda of Calcutta

“truth takes many forms and believers must learn to share each other’s truths—even if they clash”

The Essence of his Thought

“Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas or sects or churches or temples; they count for little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality. All religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, are so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the Infinite, as determined by the condition of birth and association. . . . Every religion is only an evolving of God out of material man.”

Article by Chuck Colson:

Gallup reports that 20 percent of born-again Christians believe in reincarnation and 26 percent in astrology. Forty-five percent of those George Barna classifies as born again believe that "if people are good enough they can earn a place in heaven."

And Wade Clark Roof in *Spiritual Marketplace* writes that half of born-again baby boomers believe all religions are "equally good and true," almost half have no involvement in a dogmatically sound church, and a quarter believe in communicating with the dead

Boomers tend to substitute feelings for objective reality, seeking self-centered spirituality over the structured demands of organized religion. With self-fulfillment their standard, they pick and choose, as if at a salad bar, from any belief system that provides comfort or meaning. The problem is that "salad-bar Christianity" often goes unchallenged by the larger Christian community.

The church has lost the capacity to judge between good and evil, truth and falsehood.

Isaiah 5:20-21

20 Woe to those who call evil good
and good evil,
who put darkness for light
and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet
and sweet for bitter!
21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes,
and shrewd in their own sight!

4. The Problems with Syncretism

The core issue theological: the intellectual integrity of faith in the modern world

1. Syncretism abandons the fidelity of faith.
2. Syncretism negates the authority of faith.
3. Syncretism severs the continuity of faith.
4. Syncretism destroys the credibility of faith.

5. Syncretism obliterates the very identity of faith.

Dialectical Frame of Mind:

Morality, because its all relative is all a matter of a frame of mind.

It all depends on where you live.

It all depends on what you feel.

It all depends on how you're raised.

It all depends on what is praised.

What's right today, is wrong tomorrow.

Joy in France is England's sorrow.

Dialectical Frame of Mind

It all depends on point of view.

Australia, or Timbuktu.

In Rome do as the Romans do.

If tastes just happen to agree, then you have morality.

But where there are conflicting trends it all depends.