

Newsletter

First Presbyterian Church

of Sylva, North Carolina

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PASTOR'S CORNER

Pluralism - What Does Pluralism Mean to Me?

By David Grachek

We live in a pluralistic society. Pluralism is the advocacy and embrace of a social system that promotes the autonomy and ongoing development of diverse religious, ethnic, racial and social groups within the system. In theology, pluralism suggests that there are many paths to and expressions of truth about God and several equally valid means to salvation.

A pluralism definition has the basis in operating under the principles of acceptance and diversity. It is promoted as a system for the "common good" of all. It is a coming together with common recognition and credence to all beliefs and developments of modern social, scientific, and economic societies.

Religious pluralism is a set of worldviews that stands on the premise that one religion is not the sole exclusive source of values, truths, and supreme deity. It therefore must recognize that at least "some" truth must exist in other belief systems. This is one example of "they can't all be right."

Religious Pluralism - A Question of Truth, Not Tolerance

Religious pluralism is obvious within the Christian church today, as revealed dramatically by the foregoing transcript. Some would say this is great, revealing a new message of tolerance for the world. However, Jesus Christ didn't mince words when He declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the

life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Religious tolerance is fine, but it can't change the true meaning of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Descriptively, a situation characterized by a number of alternative religions and diverse perspectives on religion, with the resulting problem for adherents of each view of what attitude to take toward the other views. The contemporary world is in most places undeniably pluralistic in this sense. However, for some, the term *pluralism* has taken on a normative sense in which it implies an endorsement of this plurality and a refusal to see one religion as truer than others or superior to others in any way.

Don't all religions lead to God?

Don't all religions lead to God? Before answering this question, a word of warning is in order. If you answer in the negative, you may well be ostracized for being narrow-minded and intolerant. That being said, it is incorrect and illogical to maintain that all religions lead to God.

First, when you begin to examine world religions such as Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, you will immediately recognize that they directly contradict one another.

For example, Moses taught that there was only one God; Krishna believed in many Gods; and Buddha was agnostic. Logically, they can all be wrong but they can't all be right.

Don't all religions lead to God?

Furthermore, the road of religion leads steeply uphill, while the road of Christianity descends downward. Put another way, religion is fallen humanity's attempt to reach up and become acceptable to God through what we do; Christianity, on the other hand, is based on what Christ has *done*. He lived the perfect life that we could never live and offers us his perfection as an absolutely free gift.

Don't all religions lead to God?

Finally, Jesus taught that there was only one way to God. "I am the way and the truth and the life," said Jesus, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Moreover, Jesus validated his claim through the immutable fact of his resurrection. The opinions of all other religious leaders are equally valid in that they are equally worthless. They died and are still dead. Only Jesus had the power to lay down his life and to take it up again. Thus, his opinion is infinitely more valid than theirs. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

What is moral pluralism?

Moral pluralism is the assumption there are moral truths, but that they do not form a body of coherent and consistent truths as those found in the sciences or mathematic approach. There are plural, in other words many truths, not just one, and they may conflict with one another.

Within the moral domain, there are conflicting theories even with regard to goodness and rightness, and each theory contains important truths about moral life. And yet, none of them contain the whole truth per se. We all inhabit a common world, with judgments and interpretations playing a part in the process.

Finding the common ground in both the text and life is a challenge for society. Acknowledging the conflicting insights, and establishing a common ground in trying to learn to live with our differences is at the core of pluralism. This dealing with scripture and its meaning can be found to be an obstacle for many in agreeing on the meaning of a given text.

For some, if the action gives a positive result, they consider the action a morally good thing to do. In other words, because it produced good consequences, it was the right

thing to do. Others look at how the consequence affects us, and they believe each person is the best judge of his or her own self-interest and thus leans toward selfishness, but morality encourages compassion, love, and a sense of others.

And then there's a group who thinks we should do what produces the greatest good for everyone, not just for me. They believe moral disputes can be resolved by objectively computing the outcome, or the consequences of actions.

For the Christian, what makes an act right is that it is commanded by God and what makes it wrong is that it is forbidden by God. These truths are drawn from the text of the Bible and considered sacred.

And thus, we have moral pluralism with similar distinctions and different outcomes depending on if the action is based on how God would want us to approach the situation, and always based on love.

The disciples lived in a world filled with plurality. When Paul began his ministry for Jesus, he had to deal and instruct those following Jesus how to function in such a world of pluralism. This is found in Acts 11:20-21 where the men were preaching in Antioch.

Antioch on the Orontes in Syria was the third largest urban center of antiquity (after Rome and Alexandria), with an estimated population of half a million, and was the headquarters of Rome's Syrian legion. With a famous cult center of Apollo within walking distance and Seleucia, its port city off the Mediterranean coast, only a brief river journey, it boasted numerous mystery cults and was known for its pagan religious diversity. Because of its cultural pluralism, it included an upwardly mobile and *generally* accepted Jewish element with many "God-fearers" (Acts

10:2) and was far less segregated than Alexandria. Some more liberal non-Palestinian Jewish people saw their witness to the God of Israel among the Gentiles as making monotheism reasonable and contacting the best in pagan philosophy; circumcision was to them a lesser issue. Thus Antioch was a more natural place for Gentiles to hear the gospel without circumcision than Judea was (Acts 15:1).

Most of our days are lived in places like Antioch. Our culture today values itself as one of great technical advances due to modernism. Out of arrogance, our culture seems today to feel that this modernism and postmodernism has created new issues and new realities that the Bible has no answer for when the truth is actually the opposite. The early church lived in very similar circumstances. Although they were not far removed from Jesus walking among them in the flesh, their eyes could be diverted to the cultural comforts, which were easier to understand and feel and experience.

We will spend some time this summer working through the book of Acts to better understand the similarities when compared to our culture today.

Our focus is our solution. Jesus told his disciples in a private moment, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Luke 10:23-24). There is no reason why our world will not always be in some sort of pluralism. There will always be two sides to every story regarding salvation or daily living or any argument. It is imperative for Christians to hold fast to what Jesus taught and continues to teach us with regard to living in this pluralism. Our focus is to be on Jesus Christ. Our lives should shine Christ. Our conversations should express Christ. Our relationships should be Christ-centered.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says, "May you live in interesting times". I believe we live in a time where Christians are being asked to express truth in their walk as well as their talk.

We have just completed a series titled "Consecrate Yourself" bases upon the text Joshua 3:5. Joshua went all throughout the people pleading with all to set them apart for the Lord as they were all on the doorstep to entering into the Promised Land. While taking the Promised Land, Joshua also told them all to make a choice:

*^{NIV} **Joshua 24:15** But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."*

The answer to pluralism is "choose for yourselves this day who you will serve... as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD". Jesus has asked us to "make disciples of all nations". Together, we can build each other up and mature one another in our faith all for the purpose of doing God's work. I'm grateful to be a part of this church.

FAMILY LIFE DIRECTOR

One of the engines that propels me further down this road of faith is continuing to see God's Word become flesh and dwell among us, because He is glorious. I and my family are so blessed to be in the midst of a congregation, and blessed with a pastor, who are clearly committed to living out the Word of God in how they love, hope, encourage, share your faith, forgive, comfort, feed, clothe, visit, heal, pray for and bear with one another in love. I was also blessed recently by witnessing how God's Word is made flesh in the

lives of several missionaries who spoke at our Gatlinburg Missions Conference. Shawn and Jen Casselberry work with a group called Mission Year that brings in young people, 18-29 who give a year of their life to work and live in the inner city; taking God at His Word to love God with everything and to love their neighbor. A church in Richlands, VA is loving their community and beyond each year through a variety of community and global outreach. David Barnhart works with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance creating important documentaries that share the stories of the survivors of the Tsunami of 2005 and Hurricane Katrina and how the ministry of Presbyterian Disaster Assistance is helping to rebuild those communities and lives. Also in Gatlinburg was Jonathan Detweiler. Jonathan and I grew up in Marion, VA together and now Jonathan and his wife Denise live in the Netherlands where Jonathan works with the group Athletes In Action. This ministry uses sports and recreation to build bridges of relationship that make the sharing of the Gospel meaningful.

Before Jonathan and Denise worked with Athletes In Action, Jonathan used to work with a ministry in Mississippi begun by John Perkins. John Perkins' life and ministry are focused on the importance of reconciliation through Christ; our relationship with our Heavenly Father, our individual relationships and our societal relationships. Perkins was beaten nearly to death because of his involvement as a black man in the work of civil rights, but because Perkins brings life to the Word that says we are to forgive our enemies, many have seen the Glory of God through his forgiveness and love. Our youth group will be traveling to Jackson, MS this summer to work with the John Perkins Foundation, which seeks to live out the following thoughts from Perkins's book, Let Justice Roll Down, "God made His love visible to the world in the person of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ made His love visible to the world in His unselfish death on the cross for our sins. So it becomes our responsibility as the Body of Christ to so live out His life on earth as to make the love of God visible in our time. And in

our community." My prayer is that through encountering this lived out faith in Jackson, MS we may more fully live out our faith in Sylva, NC. I asked Jonathan about his time in Mississippi and what scriptures might pertain to our own upcoming trip. I am so thankful for his suggestion: "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." (1 Thessalonians 2:8). I pray that this might become true for our youth this summer, and I pray this scripture as thanksgiving for you who have made this Word flesh to me. Thank you for powerfully not only sharing the gospel, but also your lives. You are very dear to us.

Christ's Peace,
David Cathcart

MISSION NEWS

Presbyterian Home for Children has a new name. Its name is now **Black Mountain Home for Children, Youth and Families** which more clearly defines its ministry.

A Word from the President – Tom Campbell

I continue to be amazed at how God uses individuals, churches, businesses, and schools to provide exactly what this ministry needs exactly when it's needed. Our youth and staff are blessed and encouraged as they see others step in to help provide for our needs.

Recently I talked with one of our teenagers who arrived several weeks before Christmas. He shared that this was his best Christmas ever. He couldn't believe that the items he wrote down on his wish list were waiting under the tree for him on Christmas morning. He was surprised that individuals he had never met would buy Christmas presents for him and put in the extra time and effort to make sure they got precisely what he wanted.

The most exciting part is that he was able to share some of this generosity with his mother. After receiving some money, gift cards, and small gifts at different Christmas

parties, he assembled a Christmas package to send to his mother. He was so excited to share some of the joy he was experiencing with his mom.

And that's what makes this ministry so special. As our youth watch you care, pray, and give, they want to share with others what you've so generously given to them. I look forward to continuing to partner with you in 2011 as we seek to glorify God by caring for children and families.

NEW ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS

What is Jesus worth to you? It's easy for American Christians to forget how Jesus said his followers would actually live, what their new lifestyle would actually look like. They would, he said, leave behind security, money, convenience, even family for him. They would abandon everything for the gospel. They would take up their crosses daily...but who do you know who lives like that? Join the Adult #3 Sunday School Class (meets upstairs) for a nine-week book discussion of "Radical" by David Platt, beginning Sunday, March 6th at 10 am. Books are available. Contact Mary Kelley for more information. (828-226-1036) / marylynnkelley@gmail.com.

EVANGELISM TEAM REQUEST

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)

David Grachek's recent sermon was perfect for what I have been thinking and planning since I accepted the call to lead the Evangelism Team for First Presbyterian. I'm always amazed at God's divine choreography. I have asked a few of you in the body for assistance in spreading the Good News and am thankful for the positive response. However, we need a few more disciples. At this point, we are still in the brainstorming phase and our only confirmed project underway is establishing a new website. We need your help

and are in need of any of your gifts you can make available to us. If you are not an extrovert and are shy, don't worry. I think God has made me outgoing enough and we won't be asking anyone to stand on the street corners shouting "Repent . . . The End is Near!" We think it would be great to embrace ideas from our other ministries such as (but not limited to): music, Christian Ed, Youth, Women, Deacons, and (insert your ministry here). Please pray about Christ's work in your life and how you can help our Church obey the Great Commission. Call or email me anytime.

Erik Enberg
Session Class of 2011
828-226-1290
www.wcrentals.com

A NOTE FROM YOUR TREASURER

We are experiencing some tough times paying the bills this month. I pray that good weather and good health for our members and friends will allow people to get to church and share their tithes and additional offerings. Please review your giving and help us by mailing your gifts when you cannot attend. We continue to trust God to provide for His church and its mission. Mail to PO Box 2152, Sylva, NC 28779, attention tellers.

From Jackson County Department on Aging

Thank you for your time and effort. With your help, we received and delivered three hundred eighty Christmas boxes to the elderly of this area. Thank you for helping make Christmas more merry.

Deadline for the next issue: March 13

CALLING ALL CHILDREN

We are having a Spring Fling on Saturday, March 12th from 10:00 to 11:30 am for children ages 3-12. Mark your calendars. More details later.

YOU ARE INVITED

Thursday, March 17, 12:00 noon – Balfour Knight will be presenting a celtic harp concert in the Parish Hall of Grace Church in the Mountains in Waynesville, as part of the church's noon concert series. The church is located at 394 N. Haywood Street. See the invitation posted in the fellowship hall.

Saturday, April 16, 10:00 am to 2:00 pm - Work, Worship & Play Day at the Black Mountain Home for Children, Youth and Families. Come and join the staff as they give the campus a spring cleaning. We'll work, have lunch together, enjoy a time of worship and then head out to play on what we hope will be a lovely spring afternoon. There will be a sign-up sheet on the kitchen pass-through counter in order to let the Home know how many from our church expect to be there.

CHURCH LIBRARY NEWS

If you are looking for some entertaining, inspiring and thought-provoking fiction, try the House of Hope series by Neta Jackson. It is set in the same Chicago neighborhood as her Yada, Yada series with some of the same characters showing up but you don't need to have read the first series to enjoy this one. There are four books that follow the story of Gabby Fairbanks, who finds her marriage unraveling. Suddenly she is homeless and needing help from God and His people. All four books (Where Do I Go?, Who Do I Talk To?, Who Do I Lean On? Who Is My Shelter?) are in our church library. Enjoy!

FINANCIAL REPORT YEAR-TO-DATE

As of the end of January

	<u>2011</u>	<u>2010</u>
Income to Regular Budget	22,680	17,342
Expenses from Regular Budget	21,794	19,407

“Live in such a way that those who know you but don't know God will come to know God because they know you.”

–Sign seen in a country store in Westminister, Maryland

ARE YOU MINISTERING IN MARCH?

Coffee Fellowship:

6 Tom & Melanie Tabor
13 The Cathcarts
20 Charles & Frances Hess
27 Barry & Debbie Woods

Kid's Club:

No Kid's Club
Marlies Owens
TBA
TBA

Flowers:

David & Jenny Porter
Doug & Doris Cody
Charles & Frances Hess
Barry & Debbie Woods

Family Night Supper: March 2

Blair & Joan Yount,
Roger & Grace Blunt

Ushers & Greeters:

Tom & Melanie Tabor,
Doug & Doris Cody

Deacon of the Month:

Betty Foti, 586-6807;
Tommy Thompson, 586-6229
(alternate)

Communion: March 6

Preparers: Joe Scott, Jebby Webster
Servers: Joe Scott, Jebby Webster,
Judy Henderson, Tommy Thompson

ARE YOU MINISTERING IN APRIL?

Coffee Fellowship:

3 Patti Dennis
10 Roger & Josh Moore
17 Jim & Sylvia Smythe
24 Mary Kelley

Kid's Club:

No Kid's Club
Sylvia Smythe
Kelly Doppke
Stacey Grachek

Flowers:

The Cathcart
Dottie Thornburg
Don & Peggy Morgan
Herald & Gloria Stockton

Family Night Supper: April 6

Tom & Melanie Tabor,
Doug & Doris Cody

Ushers & Greeters:

Phil & Patti Dennis,
Alex Sparling

Deacon of the Month:

Roger Moore, 226-6188;
Mike Doppke, 293-0613
(alternate)

Communion: April 3

Preparers: Roger Murajda, Jessica Morgan
Servers: Roger Murajda, Jessica Morgan, Judy
McManus, Blair Yount, Roger Moore, Tommy
Thompson