

Religious Pluralism

In a multi-cultural world

Some Of The Questions Of Religious Pluralism:

We may face questions about religious pluralism when we relate with people of other cultures and religious faiths.

1. How do we respect other religious beliefs and their practices?
2. Do we honor other religions as valid paths, if we honor them at all?
3. Is other (non-Christian) religion inclusive of God?
4. Are there similarities in the truths taught by different religions?
5. Is the conception of the “ultimate goal” the same in other paths as in Christianity?
6. Are there salvific components in religions other than Christianity?

Some Mainline Views Relating To Religious Pluralism

Exclusivism — contains a spectrum of views:

All religions other than Christianity are related to Christianity by one of several viewpoints.

- 1) All other religions are false religions at best, and at worst are demonic.
- 2) Other religions may be valid and contain some truth, but can not provide salvation to the individual (salvific components).
- 3) “There is no other name by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12).”
- 4) Only those religions that are explicitly opposed to Christianity are incorrect. “... for whoever is not **against us** is for **us**.” (Mark 9:38-40)

Inclusivism — Convergent Paths

This viewpoint holds that all paths lead to the same place. It often argues that there are similar principles at work in each world religion taking individuals to the top of the same mountain, but by different climbing routes.

Inclusivism — Divergent Paths

According to this viewpoint, each path is valid in its own right, but each path leads to a different place. This viewpoint is inclusivistic and respectful of other religions. It acknowledges differences in worldview as well as the ultimate destination.

Inclusivism — Compromised differences

This viewpoint often takes the differentiating factors of a religion and negates them to bring a more coherent system that provides for inclusivity. Often this is done at the cost of long-held beliefs in individual religious systems.

Religious Pluralism Spectrum

Christian Meta-Narrative

When we look at Christianity, we find some basic theological cornerstones on which Christianity has been built over the last 2000 years. These cornerstones have been the subject of various councils, debates, divisions, and heresies within Christianity. Below are some of the basic texts pertaining to the divinity of Christ, and his uniqueness among all human beings.

These cornerstones make up a “meta” level of traditional Christian thought, providing a basic common denominator about how we think about Christianity.

Relevant Texts: All from NIV

Prophecies of Jesus:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans ^[a] of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins ^[a] are from of old, from ancient times. ^[a] " **Micah 5:2**

¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you ^[a] a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and ^[a] will call him Immanuel. **Isaiah 7:13-14**

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, ^[a] Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **Isaiah 9:6**

Post - Jesus Arrival:

¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²The same was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. **John 1:1-3**

⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸This is why it ^[a] says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." ^[a] ⁹(What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions ^[a]? ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) **Ephesians 4:7-9**

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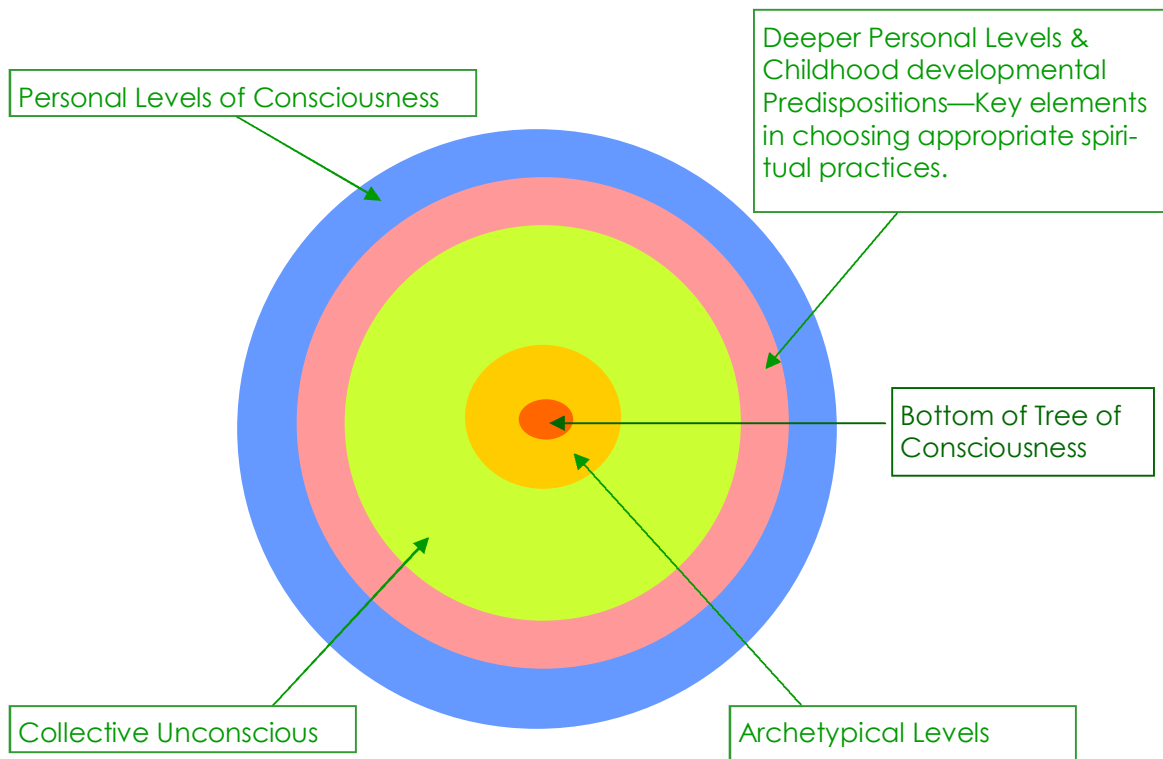
A Central Model

A Central Model - The Rosetta Stone Of Description & Consciousness

The study of multiple religions is not an “apples to apples” comparative study. Religious prescriptive paths are often defined and described in ways unfamiliar to those in other cultures and with other religious backgrounds. But there are also similarities in the principles and practices presented. Are these principles and practices parallel to one another? We might ask questions such as: if the Buddhist and the Hindu and the Christian mystic were to meditate, would they end up in the same place (if they used the same methodologies)? We might also ask how we could describe these practices.

In order to step across the barriers created by culturally specific metaphors, we have used a centralized model of human consciousness to describe these practices. The model we use is inclusive of several key components; It is a model of mind that is inclusive of but not limited to the physical world. Below is a rough diagram of a model of the stratification of consciousness.

Central Model of Consciousness & Human Experience



The Mission

Web: Missionrenewal.org Email: info@missionrenewal.org
Phone: 315-855-4693 Fax: 877-388-8389

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