

A word to the wise:

Unless you've been asleep all semester, you know where Dr. Cutsinger stands spiritually. He is a perennialist, and the subject matter of the class has been explained from that perspective. For a number of reasons, I believe that this worldview is incorrect—and dangerously so.

The religions we have studied this year cannot be reconciled to each other. The Buddhist *nirvana*, a state of complete personal erasure, is neither exoterically nor esoterically similar to the Hindu *moksha*, a personal expansion and union with the *Brahman*. Neither of these bears any resemblance to the Muslim promise of virgins and sensual pleasures, and the Christian conception of Heaven is also unique in its inhabitants being neither “blown out” nor united with the Divine nor satisfying their lusts. The Christian afterlife is described in this way: “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them” (Rev. 21:3).

This type of discrepancy can be found between nearly all of the esoteric aspects of the world's religious faiths. As Dr. Cutsinger himself pointed out, the scriptures of different traditions will tell you completely different things about time, about the nature of the physical world and about our relation to the Divine. Are we to believe that these are merely exoteric ideas? To the contrary, they are among the fundamental questions to be answered by any religious doctrine.

I do not have a degree in religious studies from Harvard, but here is my theory—take it or leave it: The world's religions are exoterically similar but esoterically disparate.

For the Christians in this class, perennialist theology should be especially difficult to swallow. If it seems to make sense now, please keep in mind that you have just spent a semester being indoctrinated in its teachings.

Someone brought up John 14:6 in class a while back, the passage where Christ proclaimed, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” I will concede that the usage of the word “me” leaves a semantic gap for possibilities of a perennial Son of God. However, at several other points in Scripture, the wording is far more explicit.

When questioned about the healing of a crippled man, Peter responded, “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed... 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 4:10, 12). Jesus put it this way: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). I challenge you to test these words for ambiguity. Christians would also do well to ponder Galatians 1:6-9.

We all know the final exam question: “Are you a perennialist?” Some people may not be comfortable answering this in an essay, but I sincerely hope that each of you will come up with an answer anyway. It is far more than an essay prompt. If there is in fact a supernatural reality beyond what we perceive empirically, then the question of faith is easily the most important question we will ever answer.

And if we seek the Truth in earnest, I am convinced that it will find us.

Shalom,
Paul Bowers