

## The Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less

1) Our dual questions came from one congregant reading through "Sapiens - A History of Humankind" (by Yuval Harari): a) Did religion serve a sociological purpose in the evolution of our species, and b) how does Christianity fit into all the world's religions?



2) In regard to the first question, yes, religion served a tribal function in the ancient world, each people having its own deities who would vie with the surrounding groups and their gods, and political leaders often claiming divine status in order to underwrite their authority.

3) Thus, Judeo-Christian monotheism represents a big leap forward, assuming that there is only one true God for all (Deut. 6.4), as was Jesus' idea of God's global, borderless, spiritual kingdom (John 18.36) which unites all as one human family.

4) Harari suggests that the sciences should replace religion as the foundation that unites us now, but in so doing positions religion and science as a false dichotomy, making them an either/or or dated/modern choice instead of a complementary both/and.

5) At root, sociology isn't nearly a comprehensive enough explanation of the human impulse toward religion and spirituality.

6) As to the 2nd question about how Christianity fits in with other world religions, we appealed to one of our PCUSA creeds for guidance - The Confession of 1967, 9.41-9.42 [confess67.pdf](#).

7) The creed asks of us a humble and modest posture toward other religions, recognizing that Christianity itself is a "religion" and should not be equated with God's self-revelation in Christ, and that Christ alone is the measuring stick for all religions, including our own.

8) Second, we are told to prioritize finding parallels between Christianity and other religions, because at root we assume that God, and specifically Christ His Word/Logos, is the light that all people seek and that enlightens everyone (See John 1.4,9).

9) Third and last, the creed says that Christians should be marked by "openness and respect" for other religions.

10) This is in part a turning from our past as a denomination, a public admission that we've not always had a positive impact on the non-Christians that we've encountered.

## Quotes to Chew On

### Albert Einstein:

Religion and science go together. As I've said before, science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind. They are interdependent and have a common goal—the search for truth. Hence it is absurd for religion to ban Galileo or Darwin or other scientists. And it is equally absurd when scientists say that there is no God...Without religion there is no charity. The soul given to each of us is moved by the same living spirit that moves the universe.

### Miroslav Volf, in Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World:

With their feet firmly planted in ordinary realities, human beings always extend their hands beyond the stars into the transcendent...Reference to transcendence isn't an add-on to humanity, rather, it defines human beings. That's the structural restlessness of the human heart. When we come to rest in the divine...the relation to the divine becomes the axis of our lives...For world religions, life lived only on the flat plan of this world is too caged, too hollow, and too light...Whether we are aware of it or not, in all our longings, in one way or another, we also long for God.

### Paul Knitter (professor of theology at Union Seminary in New York, specializing in comparative religions):

To encounter the God of Jesus Christ is not to meet a stranger.

### From Turn to the Living God (PCUSA, 1991):

As our Christian affirmation meets the faith of others, we are not called to respond in judgment but in awareness of the limitless, saving presence, power, and grace of God...We should affirm what God has done and is doing among them, and love them.

## Dig Deeper this Week

1) The book of Acts is full of encounters between Christians and non-Christians that embody the principles you discovered in The Confession of 1967. Check out these two, the first a master class in identifying and using non-Christian cultural beliefs to explain Christianity (Paul's sermon in Athens) and the second an account of God's work in the life of Roman centurion prior to him ever hearing the good news of Christ:

[Acts 17.16-34 NRSVA](#)

[Acts 10 NRSVA](#)

2) Two PCUSA resources

More counsel from our denomination about how Christians should - and should not - interact with other faiths. Note - the second resource is significantly shorter, but both can be downloaded for free as PDFs.

- Turn to the Living God - A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ's Way (1991):

[Turn to the Living God: A Call to Evangelism in Jesus Christ's Way](#)

- The official interreligious stance of the PCUSA (2014):

[Presbyterian Mission Agency Interreligious Stance](#)

3) Some basic principles for good interfaith dialogue and engagement:

[Some Basic Principles for Interfaith Dialogue](#)

[Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue](#)

4) An exemplary interfaith friendship - the Dalai Lama and the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

[MISSION: JOY • Official Trailer • Documentary About the Dalai Lama & Desmond Tutu's Friendship](#)

[The Book of Joy by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and His Holiness the Dalai Lama](#)

[The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World](#)

5) A 30 minute presentation by Miroslav Volf (quoted above) on religion and human flourishing in a globalized world:

[Dr. Miroslav Volf, "Religion and Human Flourishing in a Globalized World"](#)