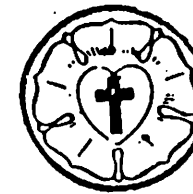


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Beware of 'Comparative Religion'

By D. L. Cuddy, Ph.D.

It was recently acknowledged by a number of diverse groups that religion had been excised from our nation's public school textbooks. While the remedy should have been simply to replace the largely Christian influence in America's history that had been excised, instead a coalition of 14 organizations in the Summer of 1988 called for religion to be included among the subjects studied in school, but without implying acceptance of any one religion and without invoking religious authority to teach moral values.

Rev. Thomas Gallagher, Secretary for Education at the U.S. Catholic Conference, hailed this education project which would "not impose any particular view" by saying,

"It could lead to ... more tolerance and understanding." In so speaking, he seemed to support the attitude of Pope John Paul II who at UNESCO headquarters in France some time ago spoke about the culture of Christianity, but emphasized that "in no way was he diminishing the value of other heritages deriving from other religious, humanistic or ethical sources."

Years ago, the World Religions Curriculum Development Center in the U.S. developed a high school course titled, "Religion in Human Culture," to develop attitudes of respect for and the legitimacy of others' beliefs and practices, "safeguarding against dogmatic 'right answerism.'" In this regard students would see and hear Jain prayers, Buddhist chants and Hindu rituals.

At this point, let me be as "dogmatic" and judgmental as I can possibly be, and say that Jesus Christ, not eastern occult religions, is the only way to salvation. Furthermore, our schools have no business attempting to "legitimize" or create "respect for" false religions. In these days of acceleration

toward "change," Christians must be urged to use more discernment and not be led into soul-threatening syncretism.*

Who are the people behind the push for "comparative religion?" In 1950 at Oxford University, England, there was founded a "Union for the Study of the Great Religions," with Chairs in many of the world's universities. Then in 1960, The Temple of Understanding was begun and is now located at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. One of its Directors has been "New Ager" Jean Houston (who conducted research on LSD, writing of its "benefits"), and it has initiated the North American Interfaith Network, which is holding a conference titled, "A North American Assisi: Learning to Live Together," at Wichita, Kansas, October 30 to November 1, 1988, where Diane Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion at Harvard University will speak. (See related article in THE CHRISTIAN NEWS, July 25, 1988, pp. 1 and 28.)

Another "New Age" organization promoting "comparative religion" is the Lucis Trust, founded in 1922 (Lucis Publishing Company was formerly called Lucifer Publishing Company), which has published all the works of Alice Bailey, a Theosophist and leader of the "New Age" movement. Theosophy, which seeks to blend religion, philosophy and science, encourages "comparative religion" and promotes the "New Age," because theosophists say that "rigid, narrow, unenlightened Christianity held little hope for man's own self-redemption." The fact is that man will never "redeem himself" through Theosophy or anything else, but only through an acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Misled Lutheran pastors met in Texas in 1977 to hear New Ager Jean Houston explain how the "New Age" and Christianity could merge. And more recently, an "interfaith wor-

ship service" among Jews, Baha'is, Christians and Muslims was held October 20, 1985 at Immanuel Lutheran Church in St. Louis.

All Lutherans, Catholics and other Christians must wake up before it is too late, and return to the Biblical Truth, instead of being led astray by New Agers' attempts at syncretization via "comparative religion," which places Christianity on a par with false religions. Jesus Christ clearly stated, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Those religions which do not accept Jesus' claim in effect are accusing our Lord of being a liar, and they therefore deserve neither our "respect" nor any "comparison" on par with Christianity, which is the only true religion.

*Syncretism — from the Greek *synkretizein* ("to combine"). A term introduced by Plutarch to characterize the harmonizing efforts of the Neoplatonists. The term refers to the blending of philosophical doctrines from opposing schools, or religious doctrines from different faiths, in an effort to gain a unified point of view. In philosophy the term is usually pejorative, and the mixture of doctrines undistinguished, the common opinion being that superficiality is bound to result from syncretism. (From *DICTIONARY OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION, Eastern and Western Thought* by W. L. Reese.)

In research on the history of the syncretist movement, including "comparative religion," the most informative book found was titled, *A STUDY IN SYNCRETISM: The Background And Apparatus Of The Emerging One World Church*, available (\$5.50) from Canadian Intelligence Publications, Box 130, Flesherton, Ontario N0C 1E0 Canada.