

HOW THEN SHOULD WE THINK?

©Richard L. Smith PhD

We live in an age in which the intellectual, spiritual, and social movement towards relativism and syncretism are converging with great power and influence. So often, we hear outside -- and even within the church -- "gospels" that proclaim "Jesus in addition to _____" or "Jesus less than _____."

In this pluralistic era religion and worldview are quite nebulous. Devotees approach the sacred realm as a sort of buffet meal, according to spiritual taste and desire. In this syncretistic context beliefs are mixed and matched according to fad, fashion, and psychic need. Tolerance and inclusivism are creedal assumptions.

For many Christianity is no longer viewed as justifiably unique or exclusive. It is simply another, particularly noxious, "weed" in the "garden of god," merely one variety of generic spirituality. As a result of this outlook, for most people today Christianity is no longer plausible. It no longer compels. It does not make sense anymore. It is not relevant for daily life.

How are we, followers of Jesus Christ, to respond to this situation? How can we demonstrate the intellectual plausibility and existential credibility of our faith? How is the absolute God to get a hearing in our generation?

First, we should learn to use our minds in God-honoring ways. We should gather information (learn), pursue understanding (study), and seek discernment (reflection) according to our biblical assumptions. Similarly, we must also look for worldly and erroneous thinking in our own understanding.

Second, we should always try to discern the assumptions in other worldviews and reasoning. We can learn to how to evaluate other positions from *within* our own worldview -- and also how other worldviews analyze our position with *their* presuppositions. We should learn to compare and contrast, discern and refute, when necessary. We should declare with David: "How great you are, O sovereign Lord! There is no one *like* you and there is no one *but* you" (2Sam 7:22).

Third, we ought to cultivate a healthy skepticism. We must no longer passively consume data delivered to us by popular culture. The writer of Genesis did not passively observe its surrounding Mesopotamian culture. The apostle Paul did not passively affirm unbelieving thought within his eclectic and syncretistic context. When he was in Athens, "his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there."

We should seek the same Spirit-inspired motivation.

We should cultivate our cognitive capacities and a discerning heart to communicate truth in compelling and compassionate ways.