

# **THE EFFECT OF SYNCRETISM ON CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY**

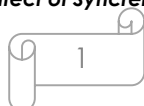
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*Rev(Dr) P.H. Bamaiyi on The Effect of Syncretism on Christian Spirituality*



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# **THE EFFECT OF SYNCRETISM ON CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY**

- PROTOCOLS
- PRESENTING WITH THE FOLLOWING ASSUMPTIONS IN MIND:
  1. MOST IF NOT ALL ARE BIBLE COLLEGE STUDENTS
  2. MATURED AUDIENCE
  3. READY TO LEARN AND HELP OUR GENERATION

***CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY: THIS IS THE QUALITY OF BEING LIKE CHRIST IN EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES.***

THIS TOPIC WILL BE DISCUSSED UNDER THE FOLLOWING SUBHEADINGS:

1. WHAT IS SYNCRETISM AND RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM?
2. THE HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF SYNCRETISM
3. SYNCRETIC RELIGIONS YESTERDAY AND TODAY
4. MANIFESTATIONS OF SYNCRETISM IN CHRISTIANITY TODAY
5. EFFECT OF SYNCRETISM ON OUR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY
6. HOW TO FLEE FROM UNSCRIPTURAL SYNCRETISM
7. A LESSON FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

***INTERLUDE***

## **WHAT IS SYNCRETISM AND RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM?**

**Syncretism** consists of the attempt to reconcile disparate or contrary beliefs, often while melding practices of various schools of thought. The term may refer to attempts to merge and analogise several originally discrete traditions, especially in the theology and mythology of religion, and thus assert an underlying unity allowing for an inclusive approach to other faiths.

Syncretism also occurs commonly in literature, music, the representational arts and other expressions of culture. (Compare the concept of eclecticism.) Syncretism may

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occur in architecture as well. There also exist syncretic politics, although in political classification the term has a somewhat different meaning.

### **Nomenclature, orthography and etymology**

The Oxford English Dictionary first attests the word *syncretism* in English in 1618. It derives from modern Latin *syncretismus*, drawing on Greek συγκρητισμός (*synkretismos*), meaning "Synchronization with Crete."

The Greek word occurs in Plutarch's (1st century AD) essay on "Fraternal Love" in his *Moralia* (2.490b). He cites the example of the Cretans, who reconciled their differences and came together in alliance when faced with external dangers. "And that is their so-called *Syncretism*."

Erasmus probably coined the modern usage of the Latin word (in his *Adagia* ("Adages"), published in the winter of 1517–1518) to designate the coherence of dissenters in spite of their differences in theological opinions. In a letter to Melanchthon of April 22, 1519, Erasmus specifically adduced the Cretans of Plutarch as an example of his adage "Concord is a mighty rampart".

### **Religious syncretism**

Religious syncretism exhibits blending of two or more religious belief systems into a new system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated traditions. This can occur for many reasons, and the latter scenario happens quite commonly in areas where multiple religious traditions exist in proximity and function actively in the culture, or when a culture is conquered, and the conquerors bring their religious beliefs with them, but do not succeed in entirely eradicating the old beliefs or, especially, practices. When the Roman Catholics conquered South America people were baptized massively without them receiving the gospel and names of their idols were replaced with that of saints through whom they could pray.

Religions may have syncretic elements to their beliefs or history, but adherents of so-labeled systems often frown on applying the label, especially adherents who belong to "revealed" religious systems, such as the Abrahamic religions, or any system that exhibits an exclusivist approach. Such adherents sometimes see syncretism as a betrayal of their pure truth. By this reasoning, adding an incompatible belief corrupts the original religion, rendering it no longer true. Indeed, critics of a specific syncretistic trend may sometimes use the word "syncretism" as a disparaging epithet, as a charge implying that those who seek to incorporate a new view, belief, or practice into a religious system actually distort the original faith. Non-exclusivist systems of belief, on the other hand, may feel quite free to incorporate other traditions into their own.

In modern secular society, religious innovators sometimes create new religions syncretically as a mechanism to reduce inter-religious tension and enmity, often with the effect of offending the original religions in question. Such religions, however, do maintain some appeal to a less exclusivist audience.

# THE HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF SYNCRETISM

## Ancient Greece

Syncretism functioned as an essential feature of Ancient Greek religion. Overall, Hellenistic culture in the age that followed Alexander the Great itself showed syncretist features, essentially blending of Persian, Anatolian, Egyptian (and eventually Etruscan-Roman) elements within an Hellenic formula. The Egyptian god Amun developed as the Hellenized Zeus Ammon after Alexander the Great went into the desert to seek out Amun's oracle at Siwa.

Such identifications derive from *interpretatio graeca*, the Hellenic habit of identifying gods of disparate mythologies with their own. When the proto-Greeks (peoples whose language would evolve into Greek proper) first arrived in the Aegean and on the mainland of modern-day Greece early in the 2nd millennium BCE, they found localized nymphs and divinities already connected with every important feature of the landscape: mountain, cave, grove and spring all had their own locally-venerated deity. The countless epithets of the Olympian gods reflect their syncretic identification with these various figures. One defines "Zeus Molossos" (worshipped only at Dodona) as "the god identical to Zeus as worshipped by the Molossians at Dodona". Much of the apparently arbitrary and trivial mythic fabling results from later mythographers' attempts to explain these obscure epithets.

**The Hellenistic age:** (4th-1st century bc), period between the conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great and the establishment of Roman supremacy, in which Greek culture and learning were pre-eminent in the Mediterranean and Asia Minor. It is called Hellenistic (Greek, Hellas, "Greece") to distinguish it from the Hellenic culture of classical Greece.

The religion of the Hellenistic Age combined the Greek gods with Eastern deities; a process known as syncretism, or the mixing of religions. The Hebrew bible was translated into Greek at Alexandria, and the language of the later New Testament was koine.

## Judaism

In *Moses and Monotheism*, Sigmund Freud made a case for Judaism arising out of the pre-existing monotheism that was briefly imposed upon Egypt during the rule of Akhenaten. Aten, the disk of the sun in ancient Egyptian mythology, and originally an aspect of Ra, was chosen as the sole deity for Akhenaten's new religion. The "Code of Hammurabi" is also cited as a likely starting point for the Jewish Ten Commandments. Hammurabi was from the Mesopotamian culture that revered Marduk, among others. Judaism fought lengthy battles against syncretist tendencies: note the case of the golden calf and the railing of prophets against temple prostitution, witchcraft and local fertility cults, as told in the Tanakh. On the other hand, some scholars hold that Judaism refined its concept of monotheism and adopted features such as its eschatology, angelology and demonology through contacts with Zoroastrianism.

In spite of the Jewish halakhic prohibitions on polytheism, idolatry, and associated practices (avodah zarah), several combinations of Judaism with other religions have sprung up: Jewish Buddhism, Nazarenism, Judeo-Paganism, Messianic Judaism, Jewish Mormonism, Crypto-Judaism (in which Jews publicly profess another faith and privately celebrate Judaism), and others. Until relatively recently, China had a Jewish community which had adopted some Confucian practices.

Several of the Jewish Messiah claimants (such as Jacob Frank) and the Sabbateans came to mix Cabalistic Judaism with Christianity and Islam.

## **Roman world**

The Romans, identifying themselves as common heirs to a very similar civilization, identified Greek deities with similar figures in the Etruscan-Roman tradition, though without usually copying cult practices. (For details, see Interpretatio graeca.) Syncretic gods of the Hellenistic period found also wide favor in Rome: Serapis, Isis and Mithras, for example. Cybele as worshipped in Rome essentially represented a syncretic East Mediterranean goddess. The Romans imported the Greek god Dionysus into Rome, where he merged with the Latin mead god Liber, and converted the Anatolian Sabazios into the Roman Sabazius.

The degree of correspondence varied: Jupiter makes perhaps a better match for Zeus than the rural huntress Diana does for the feared Artemis. Ares does not quite match Mars. The Romans physically imported the Anatolian goddess Cybele into Rome from her Anatolian cult-center Pessinos in the form of her original aniconic archaic stone idol; they identified her as Magna Mater and gave her a matronly, iconic image developed in Hellenistic Pergamum.

Likewise, when the Romans encountered Celts and Teutons, they mingled these peoples' Northern gods with their own, creating Apollo Sucellos (Apollo the Good Smiter) and Mars Thingsus (Mars of the war-assembly), among many others. In the Germania, the Roman historian Tacitus speaks of Teutonic worshippers of Hercules and Mercury; most modern scholars tentatively identify Hercules as Thor and Mercury as Odin.

## **Christianity**

Roman Catholicism appears to have emerged from many Jewish and pagan cultural elements, at least partially, whilst discarding theologically or morally incompatible elements. Note for example the strong connection between the thought of St. Augustine and Neoplatonic thought; and St. Thomas Aquinas' many citations of "The Philosopher" (Aristotle). Most scholars agree with this syncretism in principle. Medieval scholasticism engaged in prolonged and bitter debate over the place of pre-Christian classicism within the official Church teachings. Open Theists (a subset of Protestant Evangelicals) assert that Roman Catholic Christianity and some parts of Christendom by the 3rd and 4th centuries had incorporated Greek Philosophy into its understanding of God.

Syncretism did not play a role when Christianity split into eastern and western rites during the Great Schism. It became involved however with the rifts of the Protestant

Reformation, with Desiderius Erasmus's readings of Plutarch. In 1615 David Pareus of Heidelberg urged Christians to a "pious syncretism" in opposing the Antichrist, but few 17th-century Protestants discussed the compromises that might affect a reconciliation with the Catholic Church: Johann Hülsemann, Johann Georg Dorsche and Abraham Calovius (1612–1685) opposed the Lutheran Georg Calisen "Calixtus" (1586–1656) of the University of Helmstedt for his "syncretism".

The modern celebrations of Christmas (the northern European tradition that originated in pagan Yule holidays), Easter (the eastern European tradition with incorporated spring fertility rites), and Halloween are all examples of Christian/pagan syncretism. The elevation of Christmas as an important holiday, for example, grew out of the Church's need to replace the Saturnalia, a popular December festival of the Roman Empire.

Roman Catholicism in Central and South America has integrated a number of elements derived from indigenous and slave cultures in those areas; while many African Initiated Churches demonstrate an integration of Christian and traditional African beliefs. In Asia the revolutionary movements of Taiping (19th-century China) and God's Army (Karen in the 1990s) have blended Christianity and traditional beliefs. Traditional Catholics nonetheless often argue against "cafeteria Catholicism", or the act of "picking and choosing" what one wants to believe or practice.

One can contrast Christian syncretism with contextualization or inculturation, the practice of making Christianity relevant to a culture.

### **Syncretistic Controversy**

The "Syncretistic Controversy" was the theological debate provoked by the efforts of Georg Calixt and his supporters to secure a basis on which the Lutherans could make overtures to the Roman Catholic and the Reformed Churches. It lasted from 1640 to 1686. Calixt, a professor at Helmstedt, had through his travels in England, the Netherlands, Italy, and France, through his acquaintance with the different Churches and their representatives, and through his extensive study, developed a more friendly attitude towards the different religious bodies than the majority of his contemporary Lutheran theologians. While the latter firmly adhered to the "pure doctrine," Calixt tended not to regard doctrine as the one thing necessary for a Christian; while in doctrine itself he did not regard everything as equally certain and important. Consequently, he advocated unity between those who agreed on the fundamental minimum, with liberty as to all less fundamental points. In regard to Catholicism, he would have (as Melanchthon once would have) conceded to the pope a primacy human in origin, and he also admitted that one might call the Mass a sacrifice.

On the side of Calixt stood the theological faculties of Helmstedt, Rinteln, and Königsberg; opposed to him stood those of Leipzig, Jena, Strasburg, Giessen, Marburg, and Greifswald. Abraham Calov in especial opposed Calixt. The Electors of Saxony, for political reasons, opposed the Reformed Church, because the other two

secular electors (Palatine and Brandenburg) were "reformed," and were getting more and more the advantage of him. In 1649 he sent to the three dukes of Brunswick, who maintained Helmstedt as their common university, a communication in which he voiced all the objections of his Lutheran professors, and complained that Calixt wished to extract the elements of truth from all religions, fuse all into an entirely new religion, and so provoke a violent schism. In 1650 Calov became a professor at Wittenberg, and he signalized his entrance into office with a vehement attack on the Syncretists in Helmstedt. An outburst of polemical writings followed. In 1650 the dukes of Brunswick answered the Elector of Saxony that the discord should not be allowed to increase, and proposed a meeting of the political councillors. Saxony, however, did not favour this suggestion. An attempt to convene a meeting of theologians was not more successful. The theologians of Wittenberg and Leipzig now elaborated a new formula, condemning ninety-eight heresies of the Helmstedt theologians. This formula (consensus) was to be signed by everyone who wished to remain in the Lutheran Church. Outside Wittenberg and Leipzig, however, it was not accepted, and Calixt's death in 1656 ushered in five years of almost undisturbed peace.

The strife broke out afresh in Hesse-Kassel, where Landgrave William VI sought to effect a union between his Lutheran and Reformed subjects, or at least to lessen their mutual hatred. In 1661 he had a colloquy held in Kassel between the Lutheran theologians of the University of Rinteln and the Reformed theologians of the University of Marburg. Enraged at this revival of the syncretism of Calixt, the Wittenberg theologians in vehement terms called on the Rinteln professors to make their submission, whereupon the latter answered with a detailed defence. Another long series of polemical treatises followed.

In Brandenburg-Prussia the Great Elector (Frederick William I) forbade (1663) preachers to speak of the disputes between the Evangelical bodies. A long colloquy in Berlin (September 1662 to May 1663) led only to fresh discord. The Elector, however, was growing impatient with a lack of success at his conferences. He put an end to them in 1664 and published another "syncretistic" edict. Since the edict disallowed the Formula of Concord, one of the Lutheran Confessions as contained in the Book of Concord, many Lutheran clergy could not bring themselves to comply with the edict. Whoever refused to sign the form declaring his intention to observe this regulation was deprived of his position, including Paul Gerhardt, a pastor and noted hymnwriter. The citizens of Berlin petitioned to have him restored, and owing to their repeated requests an exception to the edict was made for Gerhardt, although his conscience did not allow him to retain a post which, appeared to him, could only be held on condition of a tacit repudiation of the Formula of Concord. For over a year he lived in Berlin without fixed employment. During this time his wife also died, leaving him with only one surviving child. Ironically, the edict was withdrawn a few months later, although by this time his patroness, Electress Louisa Henrietta had died and so he was still without a position.

The attempts of the Wittenberg theologians to declare Calixt and his school un-Lutheran and heretical were now met by Calixt's son, Friedrich Ulrich Calixt, The latter defended the theology of his father, but also tried to show that his doctrine did not so very much differ from that of his opponents. Wittenberg found its new champion in Aegidius Strauch, who attacked Calixt with all the resources of learning, polemics, sophistry, wit, cynicism, and abuse. The Helmstedt side was defended by

the celebrated scholar and statesman, Hermann Conring. The Saxon princes now recognized the danger that the attempt to carry through the "Consensus" as a formula of belief might lead to a fresh schism in the Lutheran Church, and might thus render its position difficult in the face of the Catholics. The proposals of Calov and his party to continue the refutation and to compel the Brunswick theologians to bind themselves under obligation to the old Lutheran confession therefore remained unimplemented. On the contrary, the Saxon theologians were forbidden to continue the strife in writing. Negotiations for peace then resulted, with Duke Ernst the Pious of Saxe-Gotha especially active towards this end, and the project of establishing a permanent college of theologians to decide theological disputes was entertained. However, the negotiations with the courts of Brunswick, Mecklenburg, Denmark, and Sweden remained as fruitless as those with the theological faculties, except that peace was maintained until 1675. Calov then renewed hostilities. He now attacked not only Calixt, but also and particularly the moderate John Musæus of Jena. Calov succeeded in having the whole University of Jena (and after a long resistance Musæus himself) compelled to renounce syncretism. But this was his last victory. The elector renewed his prohibition against polemical writings. Calov seemed to give way, since in 1683 he asked whether, in the view of the danger which France then constituted for Germany, a Calixtinic Syncretism with "Papists" and the Reformed were still condemnable, and whether in deference to the Elector of Brandenburg and the dukes of Brunswick, the strife should not be buried by an amnesty, or whether, on the contrary, the war against syncretism should be continued. He later returned to his attack on the syncretists, but died in 1686, and with his death the strife ended.

The Syncretist Strife had the result of lessening religious hatred and of promoting mutual forbearance. Catholicism thus benefited, as Protestants came to better understand and appreciate it. In Protestant theology it prepared the way for the sentimental theology of Pietism to become more popular than orthodoxy.

## SYNCRETIC RELIGIONS YESTERDAY AND TODAY

### Islam

Some scholars regard Islam as incorporating syncretically from other religions, particularly Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. Muslims do not regard this as syncretism, as they see Islam as a completion of divine revelations from Jewish and Christian prophets. It is a fundamental tenet of Islamic faith to believe in the consistency of message in the revelations from one God through many messengers to their people (Quran 2:285) and claims to be the revitalization of the original pure teaching of Allah. In traditional Islamic belief, the revelations in the Bible and Torah, over time, eventually became corrupted because of the lack of written manuscripts, serial translations from one language to another, or simply forgotten.

### Druze religion

The Druzes integrated elements of Ismaili Islam with Gnosticism and Platonism.

## **Barghawata**

The Barghawata kingdom followed a syncretic religion inspired by Islam (perhaps influenced by Judaism) with elements of Sunni, Shi'ite and Kharijite Islam, mixed with astrological and heathen traditions. Supposedly, they had their own Qur'an in the Berber language comprising 80 suras under the leadership of the second ruler of the dynasty Salih ibn Tarif who had taken part in the Maysara uprising. He proclaimed himself a prophet. He also claimed to be the final Mahdi, and that Isa (Jesus) would be his companion and pray behind him.

## **Christianity**

The Christian origination from the teaching of a Galilean Jewish rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, may be considered a form of syncretism. Christianity, like all major world religions, has adopted doctrinal stances, practices and observances which are derived from other, sometimes earlier religious traditions. The Greek Dionysus or the Roman Mithras, for example, was considered a twice-born god, and many Greek heroes such as Hercules were said to have been born from the supreme god (in this case Zeus) and a human woman.

## **Bahá'í Faith**

The Bahá'ís follow Bahá'u'lláh, a prophet whom they consider a successor to Muhammad, Jesus, Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster and others. This acceptance of other religious founders has encouraged some to regard the Bahá'í religion as a syncretic faith. However, Bahá'ís and the Bahá'í writings explicitly reject this view. Bahá'ís consider Bahá'u'lláh's revelation an independent, though related, revelation from God. Its relationship to previous dispensations is seen as analogous to the relationship of Christianity to Judaism. They regard beliefs held in common as evidence of truth, progressively revealed by God throughout human history, and culminating in (at present) the Bahá'í revelation. Bahá'ís have their own sacred scripture, interpretations, laws and practices that, for Bahá'ís, supersede those of other faiths.

## **Caribbean religions and cultures**

The process of syncretism in the Caribbean region often forms a part of cultural creolization. (The technical term "Creole" may apply to anyone (regardless of race or ethnicity) born and raised in the region.) The shared histories of the Caribbean islands include long periods of European Imperialism (mainly by Spain, France, and the United Kingdom) and the importation of African slaves (primarily from Central and Western Africa). The influences of each of the above interacted in varying degrees on the islands, producing the fabric of society that exists today in the Caribbean.

The Rastafari movement, founded in Jamaica, syncretizes vigorously, mixing elements from the Bible, Marcus Garvey's Pan Africanism movement, Hinduism, and Caribbean culture.

Another highly syncretic religion of the area, vodou, combines elements of Western African, native Caribbean, and Christian (especially Roman Catholic) beliefs.

## Indian traditions

Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in ancient India have made many adaptations over the millennia, assimilating elements of various diverse religious traditions.

The Mughal emperor Akbar, who wanted to consolidate the diverse religious communities in his empire, propounded Din-i-Ilahi, a syncretic religion intended to merge the best elements of the religions of his empire.

Sikhism blends many elements of Hinduism and Islam.

The Hindu teaching of Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar as embodied in the socio-spiritual organization Ananda Marga brings together the disparate branches of yoga for inner development, an ancient theory of social motivity and change, a theory of human and non-human welfare and intuitive insights into science with the aim to increase welfare on the planet.

## Other modern syncretic religions

Recently-developed religious systems that exhibit marked syncretism include the New World religions Candomblé, Vodou, and Santería, which analogize various Yorùbá and other African gods to the Roman Catholic saints. However, the Catholic Church condemns such syncretism. Some sects of Candomblé have incorporated also Native American gods, and Umbanda combined African deities with Kardecist spiritualism.

Unitarian Universalism also provides an example of a modern syncretic religion. It traces its roots to Universalist and Unitarian Christian congregations. However, modern Unitarian Universalism freely incorporates elements from other religious and non-religious traditions, so that it no longer identifies itself as "Christian."

Universal Sufism seeks the unity of all people and religions, as well as the ability to find beauty in all things. Universal Sufis strive to "realize and spread the knowledge of Unity, the religion of Love, and Wisdom, so that the biases and prejudices of faiths and beliefs may, of themselves, fall away, the human heart overflow with love, and all hatred caused by distinctions and differences be rooted out."

In Vietnam, Caodaism blends elements of Buddhism, Catholicism and Kardecism. Japanese syncretists founded several new Japanese religions (such as Konkokyo and Seicho-No-Ie) from the latter half of the 19th century onwards.

The Nigerian religion Chrislam combines Christian and Islamic doctrines. **Chrislam**, or the **The Will of God Mission** or **Ifeoluwa Mission** (Ifeoluwa is a Yoruba word meaning "God's Love"), is a Nigerian syncretic religion which mixes elements of both Christianity and Islam.

Founded by Tela Tella in the 1980s, the sect predominantly exists in Lagos, Nigeria. Its followers recognise both the Bible and the Qur'an as holy texts, and practice "running deliverance," a distinctive practice of spiritual running which members liken to Joshua's army that took Jericho, or the Muslim practice of circumambulating the Ka'aba.

Thelema is a mixture of many different schools of belief and practice, including Hermeticism, Eastern Mysticism, Yoga, 19th century libertarian philosophies (e.g. Nietzsche), occultism, and the Kaballah, as well as ancient Egyptian and Greek religion.

Examples of strongly syncretist Romantic and modern movements with some religious elements include mysticism, occultism, theosophy, modern astrology, Neopaganism, and the New Age movement.

### ***History Timeline of World Religions and its Founders***

2,085 BC. Judaism-Abraham

1,500 BC. Hinduism- no specific founder

560 BC. Buddhism- Gautama Buddha

550 BC. Taoism - Lao Tzu

599 BC. Jainism, Mahavira

30 AD. Christianity –Jesus Christ

50-100 AD. Gnosticism-

150-250 AD. -Modalism (Monarchianism)–Sabellius, Praxeus, Noetus, Paul of Samosata

325 AD. -After being persecuted for almost 200 years Constantine made the Church becomes a legal religion, compromise begins to enter.

590 AD.-Roman Catholicism- Developed after Constantine; Pope Gregory?

610 AD.- Islam- Mohammed

1400 AD.- Rosicrucians-Christian Rosenkreuz (1694 US) Rosicrucians- Master Kelpius, Johann Andrea

1515 AD.- Protestantism- (Reformers) Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin

1650 AD.- Tibetan Buddhism-Dalai Lama

1700 AD.- Freemasonry- Albert Mackey, Albert Pike

1760 AD.-Swedenborgism- Emmanuel Swedenborg

1784 AD.- Shakers - Mother Ann Lee

1830 AD.- Mormonism – Joseph Smith

1830 AD.-Cambellites-Alexander & Thomas Cambell, Barton Stone

1838 AD.-Tenrikyo- Miki Maegawa Nakayama

1844 AD.-Christadelphians- John Thomas

1840-45 AD.-Millerites 2<sup>nd</sup> day Adventists –William Miller then became 7th Day Adventists

1844 AD.-Bahai- Baha'u'llah (Abul Baha)

1845-1870AD.- 7<sup>th</sup> Day Adventists-E.G. White

1848 AD.-Spiritualism - Kate and Margaret Fox

1870 AD.-Jehovah's Witnesses- Charles Taze Russell

1875 AD.-Theosophical Society- H.P. Blavatsky, Henry Olcott

1879 AD.-Christian Science-Mary Baker Eddy

1889-1924 AD.-Unity School of Christianity- Myrtle Fillmore

1900 AD.-Rosicrucian Fellowship-Max Heindel

1902 AD.- Anthroposophical Society –Rudolf Steiner

1906 AD. -The Pentecostal Assemblies of the World

1914 AD.- Iglesia ni Cristo- Felix Manalo

1914 AD.- Oneness Pentecostalism- Frank Ewart, G.T.Haywood, Glenn Cook

1917 AD.-True Jesus Church. Founders Paul Wei, Lingsheng Chang and Barnabas Chang

1930 AD. -Black Muslims (Nation of Islam) –Wallace D. Fard

1927 AD.- Mind Science- Ernest Holmes

1934 AD.-World Wide Church of God- Herbert W. Armstrong

1935 AD.-Self Realization Fellowship- Paramahansa Yogananda

1954 AD.- Unification Church- Sun Myung Moon

1945 AD. -The Way -Victor P.Wierwille

1948 AD.- Latter Rain –Franklin Hall, George Warnock.

1964 AD.- Eckankar *The Ancient Science of Soul Travel* (Eck). Founded by Paul Twitchell

1968 AD.- Hare Krishna (US)- Swami Prabhupada

1968 AD.- Children of God- David (Moses) Berg

1945 AD.-United Pentecostal International- Howard Goss, W.T. Witherspoon (can be traced back to 1914)

1944 AD.- Silva Mind Control –Jose Silva

1950 AD.-Urantia Book- Dr. Bill Sadler

1950 AD.-Lafayette Ronald Hubbard published his book Dianetics-SCIENTOLOGY

1954 AD.-Atherius Society (UFO's)- Dr. George King

1955 AD.- Scientology- L. Ron Hubbard

1958 AD.- Institute of Divine Metaphysical Research- Henry Kinley

1958-1970 AD.- Church Universal and Triumphant –Mark and E.C. Prophet

1958 AD. -Henry Kinley begins (IDMR) the Institute of Divine Metaphysical Research

1959 AD.-Unitarian Universalist

1960 AD.-Transcendental meditation- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

1960 AD.-Enkankar- Paul Twitchell

1961 AD.- Unitarian Universalism was officially formed.

1965 AD.-Assembly of Yahweh-Jacob Meyer

1966 AD.- Church of Satan –Anton LaVey

1970 AD.-Findhorn Community –Peter and Eileen Caddy –David Spangler

1970 AD.- Divine light Mission- Guru Maharaj Ji

1973 AD.- CARP was established in the United States. [The Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles] to introduce the teachings of un Myung Moon.

1974 AD.-Assemblies of Yahweh-Sam Suratt

1979 AD.-Church of Christ International - Kip McKean

1980 -1982 AD.- Tara Center-Benjamin Crème





1980 AD.- House of Yahweh (Abilene) Jacob Hawkins




### Timeline: Origin of Major Religions

This table indicates the approximate date each of the twelve major world religions began, along with the traditional dates for the birth and death of its founder (if applicable).

This list of twelve world religions is, of course, an oversimplification. Also, keep in mind that there are religions (such as the belief systems of Native American and Australian Aborigine peoples) that go back much further than Hinduism, and there have been several large religions that have started since Baha'i.

The 'Common Era' refers to 1 A.D. CE=Common Era, BCE=Before Common Era

date	Near East	India	China/Japan
1000+ BCE	 <u>Judaism:</u> Moses 1500-1350 BCE	 <u>Hinduism:</u> 2000 BCE	
600 BCE	<u>Zoroastrianism:</u> Zoroaster 628-527 BCE	<u>Jainism:</u> Mahavira 599-527 BCE  <u>Buddhism:</u> Buddha 563-483 BCE	 <u>Taoism:</u> Lao Tse 580-500 BCE <u>Confucianism:</u> Confucius 551-479

			BCE
100 CE	 <p><u>Christianity:</u> Jesus 1-33 CE</p>		 <p><u>Shinto:</u> 100 CE</p>
600 CE	 <p><u>Islam:</u> Muhammad 570-632 CE</p>		
1500 CE		<p><u>Sikhism:</u> Guru Nanak 1469-1538 CE</p>	
1900 CE	<p><u>Baha'i:</u> Baha'u'llah 1817-1892 CE</p>		

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### Modern syncretic social and cultural movements

Other forms of syncretism not directly related to religion appear in the modern world as well: thus one can sometimes speak of cultural and/or social syncretism. Japanese culture after World War II and the moderate tendencies within Neo-Tribalism may serve as examples. The eclectic aspects of postmodernism represent an important contemporary example of cultural syncretism observable in much of the Western world. The socio-spiritual movement Ananda Marga, which originated in India in 1955, stems from a syncretic approach to the different strands of yoga, as propounded by its founder P.R. Sarkar. It has as its stated purpose "to help individuals achieve complete self-realization and to build a social structure in which the physical, mental and spiritual needs of all people can be fulfilled."

## MANIFESTATIONS OF SYNCRETISM IN CHRISTIANITY TODAY

**Syncretism is the process by which elements of one religion are assimilated into another religion resulting in a change in the fundamental tenets or nature of those religions.** It is the union of two or more opposite

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beliefs, so that the synthesized form is a new thing. It is not always a total fusion, but may be a combination of separate segments that remain identifiable compartments hence manifesting in different forms in Christendom today.

### **Social and political roles**

Overt syncretism in folk belief may show cultural acceptance of an alien or previous tradition, but the "other" cult may survive or infiltrate without authorized *syncretis* nevertheless. For example, some Conversos developed a sort of cult for martyr-victims of the Spanish Inquisition, thus incorporating elements of Catholicism while resisting it.

Some religious movements have embraced overt syncretism, such as the case of the adoption of Shintō elements into Buddhism as well as the adoption of Germanic and Celtic pagan elements into Catholicism during Christianity's spread into Gaul, the British Isles and Germany. Others have strongly rejected it as devaluing precious and genuine distinctions; examples of this include post-Exile Judaism and Islam.

Syncretism tends to facilitate coexistence and constructive interaction between different cultures (intercultural competence), a factor that has recommended it to rulers of multi-ethnic realms. Conversely the rejection of syncretism, usually in the name of "piety" and "orthodoxy," may help to generate, bolster or authorize a sense of cultural unity in a well-defined minority or majority.

**Specifically we are faced with a problem of meaning.** What is actually understood by words, symbols, or actions as expressed in creeds, or application to certain needs, is the test of the presence of syncretism. The receptor is the one who assigns meaning. It is therefore essential that the sender communicate with words or symbols that are not merely approximate equivalents, but dynamic equivalents, of meaning.

**Syncretism of the Christian gospel occurs when critical or basic elements of the gospel are replaced by religious elements from the host culture.** It often results from a tendency or attempt to undermine the uniqueness of the gospel as found in the Scriptures or the incarnate Son of God. The communication of the gospel involves the transmission of a message with supra - cultural elements between a variety of cultures. This includes the disembodiment of the message from one cultural context and the reembodyment of it in a different cultural context.

**Cross - cultural communication of the gospel always involves at least three cultural contexts.** The gospel message was originally given in a specific context. The receiver / sender assigns meaning to that message in terms of his own context. The receptor seeks to understand the message within a third context. The problem of syncretism will be encountered with each new outreach of the church and also as the culture changes around an established church.

1. **On ancestral worship and attachment of animals to man :**

2. **The use of African medicine that involves witch doctors and satanic herbalists**

### **3. On worship: some excesses involving paganistic beats and dances**

### **4. African sense of life-in-community such as polygamy(African Church), pregnancy before marriage**

### **5. Christmas celebrations**

The New Testament does not give a date for the birth of Jesus. Around AD 200, Clement of Alexandria wrote that a group in Egypt celebrated the nativity on Pachon 25. This corresponds to May 20. Tertullian (d. 220) does not mention Christmas as a major feast day in the Church of Roman Africa. In Chronographai, a reference work published in 221, Sextus Julius Africanus suggested that Jesus was conceived on the spring equinox. The equinox was March 25 on the Roman calendar, so this implied a birth in December. De Pascha Computus, a calendar of feasts produced in 243, gives March 28 as the date of the nativity. In 245, the theologian Origen of Alexandria stated that, "only sinners (like Pharaoh and Herod)" celebrated their birthdays. In 303, Christian writer Arnobius ridiculed the idea of celebrating the birthdays of gods, which suggests that Christmas was not yet a feast at this time.

### **Feast established**

The earliest reference to the celebration of the nativity on December 25 is found in the Chronography of 354, an illuminated manuscript compiled in Rome in 354. In the East, early Christians celebrated the birth of Christ as part of Epiphany (January 6), and this festival included the celebration of the baptism of Jesus.

Christmas was promoted in the Christian East as part of the revival of Catholicism following the death of the pro-Arian Emperor Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in 378. The feast was introduced to Constantinople in 379, and to Antioch in about 380. The feast disappeared after Gregory of Nazianzus resigned as bishop in 381, although it was reintroduced by John Chrysostom in about 400.

### **Middle Ages**

In the Early Middle Ages, Christmas Day was overshadowed by Epiphany, which in the west focused on the visit of the magi. But the Medieval calendar was dominated by Christmas-related holidays. The forty days before Christmas became the "forty days of St. Martin" (which began on November 11, the feast of St. Martin of Tours), now known as Advent. In Italy, former Saturnalian traditions were attached to Advent. Around the 12th century, these traditions transferred again to the Twelve Days of Christmas (December 25 – January 5); a time that appears in the liturgical calendars as Christmastide or Twelve Holy Days.

Excerpt from Josiah King's *The Examination and Trial of Father Christmas* (1686), published shortly after Christmas was reinstated as a holy day in England.

The prominence of Christmas Day increased gradually after Charlemagne was crowned Emperor on Christmas Day in 800. King Edmund the Martyr was anointed

on Christmas in 855 and King William I of England was crowned on Christmas Day 1066.

By the High Middle Ages, the holiday had become so prominent that chroniclers routinely noted where various magnates celebrated Christmas. King Richard II of England hosted a Christmas feast in 1377 at which twenty-eight oxen and three hundred sheep were eaten. The Yule boar was a common feature of medieval Christmas feasts. Caroling also became popular, and was originally a group of dancers who sang. The group was composed of a lead singer and a ring of dancers that provided the chorus. Various writers of the time condemned caroling as lewd, indicating that the unruly traditions of Saturnalia and Yule may have continued in this form. "Misrule" — drunkenness, promiscuity, gambling — was also an important aspect of the festival. In England, gifts were exchanged on New Year's Day, and there was special Christmas ale.

Christmas during the Middle Ages was a public festival that incorporating ivy, holly, and other evergreens. Christmas gift-giving during the Middle Ages was usually between people with legal relationships, such as tenant and landlord.

### **Reformation into the 19th century**

Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present, by John Leech. Made for Charles Dickens's novel *A Christmas Carol* (1843).

During the Reformation, some Puritans condemned Christmas celebration as "trappings of popery" and the "rags of the Beast." The Roman Catholic Church responded by promoting the festival in a more religiously oriented form. Following the Parliamentarian victory over King Charles I during the English Civil War, England's Puritan rulers banned Christmas, in 1647. Pro-Christmas rioting broke out in several cities, and for weeks Canterbury was controlled by the rioters, who decorated doorways with holly and shouted royalist slogans. The Restoration of Charles II in 1660 ended the ban, but many clergymen still disapproved of Christmas celebration.

In Colonial America, the Puritans of New England disapproved of Christmas. Celebration was outlawed in Boston from 1659 to 1681. At the same time, Christian residents of Virginia and New York observed the holiday freely. Pennsylvania German Settlers, pre-eminently the Moravian settlers of Bethlehem, Nazareth and Lititz in Pennsylvania and the Wachovia Settlements in North Carolina, were enthusiastic celebrators of Christmas. The Moravians in Bethlehem had the first Christmas trees in America as well as the first Nativity Scenes. Christmas fell out of favor in the United States after the American Revolution, when it was considered an English custom.<sup>[35]</sup> George Washington attacked Hessian mercenaries on Christmas during the Battle of Trenton in 1777. (Christmas being much more popular in Germany than in America at this time.) By the 1820s, sectarian tension had eased and British writers, including William Winstanly, began to worry that Christmas was dying out. These writers imagined Tudor Christmas as a time of heartfelt celebration, and efforts were made to revive the holiday. Charles Dickens's book *A Christmas Carol*, published in 1843, played a major role in reinventing Christmas as a holiday emphasizing family, goodwill, and compassion as opposed to communal celebration and hedonistic excess.<sup>[36]</sup> In America, interest in Christmas was revived in the 1820s by several short stories by Washington Irving which appear in his *The Sketch Book of*

Geoffrey Crayon and "Old Christmas", and by Clement Clarke Moore's 1822 poem A Visit From St. Nicholas (popularly known by its first line: *Twas the Night Before Christmas*). Irving's stories depicted harmonious warm-hearted holiday traditions he claimed to have observed in England. Although some argue that Irving invented the traditions he describes, they were widely imitated by his American readers. The poem *A Visit from Saint Nicholas* popularized the tradition of exchanging gifts and seasonal Christmas shopping began to assume economic importance. In reaction, this also started the cultural conflict of the holiday's spiritualism and its commercialism that some see as corrupting the holiday. In her 1850 book "The First Christmas in New England", Harriet Beecher Stowe includes a character who complains that the true meaning of Christmas was lost in a shopping spree. Christmas was declared a United States Federal holiday in 1870, signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant.

## **6. Ecumenism and Interfaith services**

## **7. Marriage ceremonies(gowns, etc)**

## **8. Makeri cast system(michika,fali and environs) and Osu in the south**

In Higgi and fali cultures some Christians will still not marry a fellow Christian who is considered a 'makeri' and some boycott churches or sacraments administered by such in disobedience to the scriptures. Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus". 2Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away behold all things are become new. {he is: or, let him be}"(KJV)

## **9. Twins: have powers for evil and good?**

## **10. Attendance at pagan festivals**

## **11. Statures of the virgin, saints, etc(graven images) in the church and use of incense and candles, confessional, etc: imported from ancient Babylonian religion by some sects in christendom**

# **EFFECT OF SYNCRETISM ON OUR CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY**

**The Bible reveals syncretism as a long - standing tool of Satan to separate God from his people.** It strikes at the heart of the first commandment. Beyerhaus notes a threefold answer in the OT to the challenge of external syncretism: segregation, eradication, and adaptation. Pressures from early Canaanite practices with Baal and Asherah were followed by the demands of the national gods of Assur and Babylon. Internally the prophets of Israel sought to enforce the obligatory nature of Israel's holy traditions, to apply the revealed will of God to actual situations, and to forcefully present the eschatological vision of God's continuing control, justice, and promises.

**The NT was born in a melee as rulers sought to blend cultures through syncretistic monotheism, all forms of the same God.** All the gods of Egypt, Persia, and Babylon became Greek. The influence of Mani spread from Africa to China. Esoteric knowledge vied with unique, historical revelation. Rome harbored all cults and mystery religions. Antioch, Ephesus, and Corinth each boasted syncretistic gods seeking to absorb the church. NT confrontations include Simon Magus, the Jerusalem Council, the Epistle to the Colossians, combating Jewish thought mixed with early Gnosticism, and the rebuke of the church at Pergamum. Against these forces the church developed its creeds, canon, and celebrations. The Christmas celebration date was set over against the festival of the birth of the sun god, Sol Invictus, in protest against a major attempt to create a syncretistic imperial religion.

Visser't Hooft discusses the many syncretistic pressures of the NT times exerted by Judaism, Gnosticism, emperor worship, and the mystery cults. It is helpful to study the books of Hebrews, 1 John, and the Revelation from the perspective of defending against syncretism. **The NT canon and the recognized creed became the church's two greatest weapons against the growth and transmission of syncretism.** Church history is filled with the struggle against syncretism from political, social, religious, and economic sources. Syncretistic pressure can be seen today. In our global - village context secular humanism seems to be the common ground for solving shared problems. The values of this world view strive for a place in the church's response to both the demands for conformity and the cries for liberation confronting it.

**In the striving by missionaries for an indigenous national church with a contextualized gospel, the danger of syncretism is ever present in attempts at accommodation, adjustment, and adaptation.** Tippett reminds us that while striving for relevance we must remember that in communication only message is transmitted, not meaning. Beyerhaus points out three steps in biblical adaptation:

1. Discriminating selection of words, symbols, and rites, e.g., "Logos."
2. Rejection of that which is clearly incompatible with biblical truth.
3. Reinterpretation by a complete refilling of the selected rite or symbol with a truly Christian meaning.

The supracultural teachings of Scripture must be judge of both culture and meaning as God works through men using various forms to bring all creation under his lordship.

In the history of theology the term "syncretism" is used specifically to define two movements aimed at unification. In the Lutheran tradition, George Calixtus (1586 - 1656) attempted to reconcile Lutheran thought with Roman Catholicism on the basis of the Apostles' Creed. This precipitated a syncretistic controversy that was to last for many years.

- ❖ People worship God with their lips but their hearts are far away from God
- ❖ Christians become suspicious of each other hence do not walk in love with their neighbours
- ❖ People become influenced or even possessed by demons e.g. ancestral spirits: sometimes like in the Corinthian church some may be misled by these dumb idols and spirits through some dreams,visions,false revelations, false

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prophecies and various other forms of deceits. Some are possessed by spirits of strange animals e.g. Hyena, Lion, Pig, Snake, e.t.c.

- ❖ Curses are released upon the land
- ❖ People do not prosper as they should
- ❖ The work of true evangelism is hampered
- ❖ Spiritual growth is hampered
- ❖ The doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans prevails Revelation 2:14 “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate”

## HOW TO FLEE FROM UNSCRIPTURAL SYNCRETISM

- **Back to the scriptures: The first and second commandments in Exodus Chapter 20 declare “1 And God spake all these words, saying**

**2 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. {bondage: Heb. servants}**

**3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.**

**4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:**

**5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;**

**6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.**

**Israel tried syncretism by making the golden calf that earned them the wrath of God and destruction.**

- **Back to Prayer: The Lord’s Prayer declares in Matthew 6: 9 ¶ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.**

**10 Thy kingdom come Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.**

**11 Give us this day our daily bread.**

**12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

**13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.**

- **Back to the faith of our fathers: Jude 3 ¶ “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”.**
- **Back to holiness: Hebrews 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”**
- **Back to love: Mark 12:9 And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord:**

**De 6:4; Lu 10:27**

**30 And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.**

**31 And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.**

**Le 19:18; Mt 22:39; Ro 13:9; Ga 5:14; Jas 2:8**

- **Seek deliverance from syncretistic spirits: 1Jo 3:8 “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil”.**
- **Worship in a full gospel church not a traditional church of spiritualistic church full of rituals and dogmas of men: Hebrews 10:25 “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”**

## **A LESSON FROM THE EARLY CHURCH**

They remained true to Christ even in the face of persecution. Martyrdom has a unifying effect on the persecuted community and assists its growth, a view shared by the theologian and Bishop of Lyons, St Irenaeus, who penned the often quoted words on the effect of martyrdom on the early Christian Church: “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.” The early stood for what they believed and would not allow even an angel to change it. Galatians Chapter 1: “6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

**2Co 11:4,13; 2:17; Ac 15:1,24; Ga 5:10,12**

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received let him be accursed”.

De 4:2; 12:32; Pr 30:6; Re 22:18

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