

# Exclusivism

## Introduction

Several aspects of the Christian faith stand alone as good and beneficial objectives. There are a few characteristics, however, that seem unpopular and, in some minds, contrary to the inclusive and loving nature of God. Perhaps one of the greatest manifestations of this conundrum is the concept of Exclusivism. This essay will attempt to explore the concept of Exclusivism, to define it in opposition to religious diversity, to present alternatives to it, to examine it in the Word of God, and to offer a theologically sound mediating stance of Christian Exclusivism. In doing so, it should be noted that “religious diversity is nothing new. For example, while the ancient Assyrians were bowing before the war god Ashur, the Indian Brahmin priests were worshipping Agni, the fire god. While Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah thundered warnings of impending judgment upon Judah, Confucius was teaching the virtues of *chun-tzu*. Twentieth-century globalization has, however, prompted a veritable renaissance of cultural knowledge and adaptation, particularly, but not exclusively, in the West.”<sup>1</sup> It thus becomes the task of the one seeking to make sense of the plethora of claims and counter-claims to produce a singular definition of Exclusivism, definitions of its alternative claims, and final analyses.

## Exclusivism Defined

Exclusivism is not particular to any one religion. Instead, it “is the belief that only one religion is true, and the others opposed to it are false.”<sup>2</sup> It is not specifically regarding

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.leaderu.com/theology/salvific.html/> Accessed May 15, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.inplainsite.org/html/pluralism\\_universalism\\_inclu.html/](http://www.inplainsite.org/html/pluralism_universalism_inclu.html/) Accessed May 15, 2003.

Christianity. For instance, “Islam claims theological and linguistic exclusivity.<sup>3</sup> Hinduism, while claiming to be a religion that ‘accepts all religions to be true’<sup>4</sup> is absolutely uncompromising on the authority of the Vedas<sup>5</sup>, the law of karma<sup>6</sup> and reincarnation. Buddhism was born when Gautama Buddha rejected the ultimate authority of the Vedas and the caste system. Sikhism came as a challenge to both Hinduism and Buddhism. [And] Atheists reject the viewpoints of those who believe in God.”<sup>7</sup>

In a very real way, all religions make claims which contradict the claims of others. “All truth is, by definition, exclusive. If truth does not exclude then no assertion of a truth claim is being made.”<sup>8</sup> The term ‘religious diversity’ is often used to refer to “the undisputed fact that different religions espouse doctrines that are at least apparently in conflict and offer alternative paths of salvation or liberation.”<sup>9</sup> Clearly, based upon these concepts, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Exclusivism is widely practiced among various religions. However, the majority of this essay shall be confined to Exclusivism as it relates to the Christian faith.

Basically, the problem inside the Christian faith with Exclusivism is that Christianity is accused of being exclusivistic, and indeed, she is guilty: “if Jesus was literally God incarnate, and if it is by His death alone that men can be saved, and by their response to Him alone that they can appropriate that salvation, then the only doorway to

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<sup>3</sup> Muslims believe that the sole and consummate miracle of Islam is the Qur’an, which is only recognizable in Arabic and hence requires a sophisticated knowledge of the language. Any translation is believed to de-sanctify it.

<sup>4</sup> Indian philosopher Swami Vivekananda.

<sup>5</sup> Hindu scripture.

<sup>6</sup> The law of moral cause and effect.

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.inplainsite.org/html/responding\\_to\\_religious\\_plural.html](http://www.inplainsite.org/html/responding_to_religious_plural.html). Accessed May 15, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Philip L. Quinn, *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 2000), 3.

eternal life is Christian faith.”<sup>10</sup> It should be noted, however, that “Exclusivism has more than one dimension. Doctrinal exclusivism is the view that the doctrines of one religion are mostly true and the doctrines of all others, when they conflict, are false.

Soteriological exclusivism is the view that only the path proposed by one religion leads to salvation or liberation. And experiential exclusivism is the view that the religious experiences typical of one religion are mostly veridical while conflicting experiences typical of all the others are nonveridical.”<sup>11</sup>

Exclusivism will first be examined as a separation from something else. Alvin Plantinga uses the term ‘exclusivism’ in such a way that one does not “count as an exclusivist unless [he is] full aware of other faiths, have had their existence and their claims called to [his] attention with some force and perhaps fairly frequently, and have to some degree reflected upon the problem of pluralism.”<sup>12</sup> As modernity thrusts the concept of a ‘global village’<sup>13</sup> upon contemporary society, certainly there are questions that must be asked. Similarly, “Christianity is exclusivistic: It claims to be the one and only true religion, which places Christianity at odds with the growing belief that it is all a question of ‘perspective’ and all claims to truth are equally valid.”<sup>14</sup> As this separation from all others takes place, Christianity stands clearly in the position of textbook Exclusivism: “the view that one religion has it mostly right and all the other religions go seriously wrong.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> William Lane Craig, *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 2000), 41.

<sup>11</sup> Quinn, *Philosophical Challenge*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 2000), 175.

<sup>13</sup> Craig, *Philosophical Challenge*, 40.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.inplainsite.org/html/pluralism\\_universalism\\_inclu.html#Exclusivism/](http://www.inplainsite.org/html/pluralism_universalism_inclu.html#Exclusivism/) Accessed May 17, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Quinn, *Philosophical Challenge*, 3.

The inescapable aspect of Christian Exclusivism is the fact that Jesus Himself stands at the center with His claims to exclusivity. “Jesus said... “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (John 14:6 NASB) As one observes the Christian faith and comprehends that Jesus is the center of that faith, and as one observes these self-iterated words of Jesus, then exclusivity is not merely an option. Nor is it a source for arrogance; it simply stands as a fact of Christianity that there is salvation in none other than Jesus Christ. “Christianity cannot get rid of its founder’s claim to be the only Savior.”<sup>16</sup> Other New Testament references confirm that “salvation is only through Jesus Christ.”<sup>17</sup> Examples of this are found in Acts 4:12<sup>18</sup>, 1 Corinthians 3:11<sup>19</sup>, and 1 Timothy 2:5-6<sup>20</sup>. “Christ did not come just to make a contribution to the religious storehouse of knowledge. The revelation which he brought is the ultimate standard. Since in Christ alone is salvation and truth, many religious paths do not adequately reflect the way of God and do not lead to truth and life. Jesus is not, therefore, just the greatest lord among other lords. There is no other Lord besides him.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Exclusivism in Opposition to Pluralism and Universalism**

As we search through claims of Christian exclusivity, we must observe counterclaims by other groups and religions. There are some who believe that Christians are so because they “find themselves with exclusivist religious beliefs of the cultures in

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<sup>16</sup>Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994) 347.

<sup>17</sup>Craig, *Philosophical Challenge*, 51.

<sup>18</sup> “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.” (NASB)

<sup>19</sup> “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (NASB)

<sup>20</sup> “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.” (NASB)

<sup>21</sup> Calvin E. Shanks, *Who Do You Say That I Am?* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1997), 32.

which they [grew] up.”<sup>22</sup> There are others who believe in many gods, some who believe in individuals as gods, and some who don’t believe in any god at all. In observation of these viewpoints, Kreeft and Tacelli have devised these five different questions for the Christian faith to ask regarding other religions [and thought systems]: 1) Are they true? 2) Are they good? 3) Are they salvific? 4) Are they educative? 5) Are they useful?”<sup>23</sup>

### **Pluralism**

Pluralism is the view...to which all the major religious traditions—the so-called world religions—“are in contact with the same ultimate religious reality, and all of them offer paths to salvation or liberation that are, as far as anyone can tell, equally effective in producing transformations for self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.”<sup>24</sup> It is the belief that “every religion is true. Each provides a genuine encounter with the Ultimate. One may be better than the others, but all are adequate.”<sup>25</sup> “Or, as Andrew Kirk explains, ‘Rather than confessing that Jesus Christ is the one Lord over all, this view asserts that the one Lord who has manifested himself in other names is also known as Jesus.’”<sup>26</sup> One author stated that “by ‘crossing the Rubicon,’ Christians are encouraged to abandon any claim of Christian uniqueness and the possibility of absolute revelation, accepting the fact that the Christian faith is one among many options.”<sup>27</sup> The remarkable aspect of this is that Pluralists continue to utilize the same lingo as the Christian faith in their attempt to dissuade individuals away from that faith. One Pluralist author stated that there is “no public evidence that any one religion is soteriologically unique or superior to others and

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<sup>22</sup> Quinn, *Philosophical Challenge*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Kreeft, *Christian Apologetics*, 343.

<sup>24</sup> Quinn, *Philosophical Challenge*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.inplainsite.org/html/pluralism\\_universalism\\_inclu.html/](http://www.inplainsite.org/html/pluralism_universalism_inclu.html/) Accessed May 16, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> J. Andrew Kirk, *Loosing the Chains: Religion as Opium and Liberation* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992), 11.

<sup>27</sup> John Hick and Paul Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), viii.

thus has closer access to Ultimate Reality.”<sup>28</sup> Pluralism must be rejected because in its presentation of all religions as equally valid, it fails to take into account that most religions are mutually exclusive, most have some opposing claims, and therefore, all cannot be equally expressive of truth if contradictions occur among their respective truths.

### **Universalism**

Universalism tends to come in various packages. There are those who teach that “sooner or later all people will be saved.”<sup>29</sup> There are others that teach that it is not necessary that one be conscious of how he or she lives because all will be restored to their proper relationship with the Creator. Observe what a seminal member of Universalism once said; “Christian Universalism appears to me very simple, consistent, and beautiful. It regards this world as God's, and the whole human family as His children. It accepts without distrust the fundamental fact of the gospel, that God, out of his great love to mankind, now alienated from him by sin, sent his only begotten Son to seek and to save that which was lost, and by redeeming men from sin, to restore them to their right relations with God, and thus fit them to glorify and enjoy Him forever.”<sup>30</sup>

While the sound of this is certainly hope-filled and promising because it speaks of “the final holiness and happiness of all mankind, to be effected by the grace of God, through the ministry of his Son, Jesus Christ.”<sup>31</sup> It fails to take into account the

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<sup>28</sup> "Introduction" in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis Olkholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 17.

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.inplainsite.org/html/pluralism\\_universalism\\_inclu.html/](http://www.inplainsite.org/html/pluralism_universalism_inclu.html/) Accessed May 16, 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas J. Sawyer, S.T.D., 1880. <http://www.auburn.edu/~allenkc/univart.html/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.auburn.edu/~allenkc/univart.html/> Accessed May 12, 2003.

consequences of sin as delineated through the words of Paul to the Church in Rome regarding the sinfulness of all mankind and the accompanying wages for that sin.<sup>32</sup>

### **Inclusivism**

Inclusivism is a doctrine that has sought to seep into mainstream Christianity on several fronts although it is still considered false doctrine by Evangelicals and Fundamentalists. Although it appears to be very close to Universalism, the difference made within this essay is that Universalism is apart from the Christian faith and is inclusive of all humanity while Inclusivism is recognized as a subdivision within the Christian faith and may or may not include all of humanity dependent upon whom one is observing. “Inclusivism is a family of views that occupy the middle ground between exclusivism and pluralism...Christian Soteriological inclusivism is the view that salvation through Christ is not restricted to Christianity but is available to devout members of other religious traditions, who might be thought of as...anonymous Christians.”<sup>33</sup> Inclusivism is very attractive because it appears to answer the ages-old question regarding how God deals with the heathen who have not had an opportunity to hear the Gospel. In Inclusivism, “Christian salvation...must be available to all cultures, irrespective of age or geography. Salvation is still posited wholly in Christ and his salvific work. Specific knowledge of this work, however, is not necessary for the effect (i.e., salvation) to apply to those within a different religious culture who have responded to the general revelation available.”<sup>34</sup>

Another aspect of Inclusivism acknowledges the “possibility of salvation outside of Christian faith or outside the walls of the visible church, but the agent of such

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<sup>32</sup> Romans 3:23; 6:23.

<sup>33</sup> Quinn, *Philosophical Challenge*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.leaderu.com/theology/salvific.html#text7/> Accessed May 12, 2003.

salvation is Christ, and the revelation in Jesus is definitive and normative for assessing that salvation. Jesus Christ is believed to be the center, and other ways are evaluated by how they relate to him. Other religions are not just a preparation for Christ, but Christ is actually present in them.”<sup>35</sup> In other words, it claims that “one religion is explicitly true, while all others are implicitly true and that God accepts an ‘implicit’ faith in lieu of explicit faith in Christ.”<sup>36</sup>

John Sanders is a prominent evangelical spokesman in regard to the inclusivist position. He believes that “people can receive the gift of salvation without knowing the giver or the precise nature of the gift.”<sup>37</sup> He shares this opinion with another prominent theologian, Clark Pinnock, who affirms this conviction, “Faith in God is what saves, not possessing certain minimum information.”<sup>38</sup>

It is somewhat difficult to evade the view of Inclusivism. It certainly has logic to it and does offer a response to the heathen question. What it does not do is respond to the claim of Paul to the Romans where he states, “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” (Romans 10:9-10 NASB) By all appearances, within this selected passage, there seems to be an observable requirement that action (i.e. belief in one’s heart and confession with one’s mouth) from the individual regarding Jesus Christ which must be fulfilled prior to his or her salvation.

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<sup>35</sup> Shenks, *Who Do You Say*, 43.

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.inplainsite.org/html/pluralism\\_universalism\\_inclu.html](http://www.inplainsite.org/html/pluralism_universalism_inclu.html) Accessed May 15, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation Into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 255.

<sup>38</sup> Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 158.

## **Exclusivism and Political Correctness**

In these days of political correctness and fear of legal ramifications in the event of offending someone, a new onus is placed upon the Christian church and Exclusivism. “The Christian posits Jesus as the normative rule by which all religious phenomena and traditions are evaluated.”<sup>39</sup> Those of Christian upbringing who “opt for pluralism [are] forced to tweak traditional Christology.”<sup>40</sup> Some, such as John Hick who espoused the above idea, feel that “if for example, from within Christianity, we define salvation as being forgiven by God because of Jesus’ atoning death, and so becoming part of God’s redeemed community, the church, then salvation is by definition Christian salvation. If on the other hand, from within Mahayana Buddhism, we define it as the attainment of satori or awakening, and so, becoming an ego-free manifestation of the eternal Dharmakaya, then salvation is by definition Buddhist liberation.”<sup>41</sup> This boils down to a necessary comparison of the commonality of all religions. An example of this is found in the principle of valuing others as we value ourselves, and treating them accordingly.

Thus in the ancient Hindu Mahabharata we read that ‘One should never do to another that which one would regard as injurious to oneself. This, in brief, is the rule of Righteousness (Anushana parva, 113:7) Again, ‘He who...benefits persons of all orders, who is always dedicated to the good of all beings, who does not feel aversion to anybody...succeeds in ascending to Heaven.’ (Anushana parva, 145:24) In the Buddhist Sutta Nipata we read, ‘As a mother cares for her son, all her days, so toward all living things a man’s mind should be all-embracing.’ (149) In the Jain scripture we are told that one should go about ‘treating all creatures in the world as he himself would be treated.’ (Kitanga Sutra, I.ii.33) Confucius, expounding humaneness (jen) said, ‘Do not do to others what you would not like yourself.’ (Analects, xxi, 2) In a Taoist scripture we read that the good man will ‘regard [other] gains as if they were his own, and their losses in the same way.’ (Thai Shang, 3) The Zoroastrian scriptures

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<sup>39</sup> Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 242.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> John Hick, *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, ed. Philip L. and Kevin Meeker (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 2000), 55.

declare, 'That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.' We are all familiar with Jesus' teaching, 'As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise'. In the Jewish Talmud we read, 'What is hateful to yourself, do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole of the Torah'. And in the Hadith of Islam we read Mohammed's words, 'No man is a true believer unless he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.' Clearly, if everyone acted on this basic principle, taught by all major faiths, there would be no injustice, no avoidable suffering, and the human family would everywhere live in peace.<sup>42</sup>

Hick's assessment in light of this is, "Insofar, then, as we accept that salvation is not confined to Christianity we must reject the old exclusivist dogma."<sup>43</sup> Alvin

Plantinga, however, prescribes a response to this 'commonality among religions' concept:

There are several possible reactions to awareness of religious diversity. One is to continue to believe what you have all along believed... Following current practice, I call this exclusivism; the exclusivist holds that the tenets or some of the tenets of one religion- Christianity, let's say- are in fact true; he adds naturally enough, that any propositions, including other religious beliefs, that are incompatible with those tenets are false. Now there is a fairly wide-spread belief that there is something seriously wrong with exclusivism. It is irrational, or egotistical and unjustified, or intellectually arrogant, or elitist, or a manifestation of harmful pride, or even oppressive and imperialistic. The claim is that exclusivism as such is or involves a vice of some sort: it is wrong or deplorable; and it is this claim that I want to examine. I propose to argue that exclusivism need not involve either epistemic or moral failure and that furthermore something like it is wholly unavoidable given our human condition.<sup>44</sup>

Certainly there is an argument against Exclusivism, particularly from a Pluralistic stance; yet, these arguments still do not deter the words of Christ Himself. To paraphrase the logic of C. S. Lewis, we are left with a decision to make: Christ was either Lord, liar, or lunatic. Simply being a good moral teacher is not an option that we are left with.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> John Hick, *Philosophical Challenge*, 55.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>44</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Philosophical Challenge*, 174.

<sup>45</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

### **Opposition from Within the Christian Faith**

Christianity is also plagued with disagreement concerning the Exclusivistic doctrine. Many have attempted to reason away God's decision to make only one Way to Him. Others have said that it is an unjust God Who would do such. John Hick says, "The fact that there is a plurality of religious traditions, each with its own distinctive beliefs, spiritual practices, ethical outlook, art forms and cultural ethos, creates an obvious problem for those of us who see them, not simply as human phenomena, but as responses to the Divine."<sup>46</sup> The fatalism that can creep in through this thought process is succinctly stated in the words of William P. Alston, "But then, unless I have sufficient reason for supposing that Christians are in a superior position for discerning the truth about these matters, why should I suppose that we are right and they are wrong? How can I be justified in continuing to affirm my Christian beliefs?"<sup>47</sup>

### **The Necessity of Exclusivism**

As stated previously, Christianity rests upon and centers on Jesus Christ Himself. Every statement that He made and every deed that He performed is accepted by the majority of Christians as divinely processed and understood. His statements either stand as stated or fail as mere babblings of a self-enhanced mad-man. It is the choice of Christians to believe that Jesus Christ was God incarnate and that therefore His proclamations and revelations of Himself stand as Exclusivistic. In this light, it should be understood that "Christianity's exclusive claims are not for Christianity but for Christ."<sup>48</sup> Further, fully realizing the magnitude of derision that such a proclamation will bring, it must be and, truthfully, can only be accurately stated that "the logic of the New

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<sup>46</sup> John Hick, *Philosophical Challenge*, 54.

<sup>47</sup> William P. Alston, *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, ed. Philip L. and Kevin Meeker (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 2000), 193.

<sup>48</sup> Kreeft, *Christian Apologetics*, 347.

Testament is simple and compelling: the universality of sin and the uniqueness Christ's expiatory sacrifice entail that there is no salvation apart from Christ."<sup>49</sup>

This exclusivity must be prevalent in the mind of every true follower of Christ. In fact, it was the goal of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:5-6 that "of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion." (NASB) And to avoid any doubt regarding the outcome of Christianity and its perception of Exclusivism: "Our investigation of the Christological utilization of *kyrios*, 'Logos', and 'Son of God' has already shown that on the basis of the Christological views connected with these titles the New Testament *could* designate Jesus as 'God' . . . The fundamental answer to the question whether the New Testament teaches Christ's 'deity' is therefore 'Yes.'"<sup>50</sup> Consequently, when one looks at Christian exclusivism, one must understand clearly that it "is the claim that Jesus is the only objectively real Savior. So if and when a Jew, Hindu, pagan, or atheist is saved, it is not by Judaism, Hinduism, paganism, or atheism but by Christ."<sup>51</sup>

Exclusivism is necessitated for the Christian because:

Sin is the great leveler, rendering all needy of God's forgiveness and salvation. Given the universality of sin, all persons stand morally guilty and condemned before God, utterly incapable of redeeming themselves through righteous acts. But God in His grace has provided a means of salvation from this state of condemnation; Jesus Christ, by His expiatory death, redeems us from sin and justifies us before God. It is through Him and through Him alone, then, that God's forgiveness is available. To reject Jesus Christ is therefore to reject God's grace and forgiveness, to refuse the one means of salvation which God has provided. It is to remain under His condemnation and wrath, to forfeit eternally salvation. For someday God will judge all men, 'inflicting vengeance upon those who do not

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<sup>49</sup> Craig, *Philosophical Challenge*, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Oscar Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1959), 306.

<sup>51</sup> Kreeft, *Christian Apologetics*, 347.

know God and upon those who do not obey that Gospel of our Lord Jesus. They shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might.<sup>52 53</sup>

### **The Danger of Exclusivism**

There is a danger to be warned against regarding Exclusivism, however. Through the existence of Christianity, Christians have secluded themselves from the rest of the world. There is a real difficulty in being “salt of the earth”<sup>54</sup> and “light unto the world”<sup>55</sup> if there is never any interaction with that earth/world. “Exclusivism is not an exclusivism of Christian culture, of Christian ethics, or of Christians as the only candidates for Heaven.”<sup>56</sup> It is Jesus that is exclusive and not the Christian or his or her faith. In fact, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for *all* to come to repentance.”<sup>57</sup>

It is also possible to tip someone over the edge with some of the dogmatism that Christians may engage in. Certainly, Exclusivism, while true, is a difficult situation to be in and to explain without seeming arrogant. John Hick, although distinctively Pluralistic in theology, has accurately stated, “*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church) and its Protestant equivalent- never formulated as an official dogma but nevertheless implicit within the eighteenth and nineteenth century Protestant missionary expansion- no salvation outside Christianity- such a dogma differs from other elements of Christian belief in that it is not only a statement about the potential relationship of Christians to God but at the same time about the actual relationship of non-Christians to

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<sup>52</sup> 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9.

<sup>53</sup> Craig, *Philosophical Challenge*, 38.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew 5:13.

<sup>55</sup> Matthew 5:14-16.

<sup>56</sup> Kreeft, *Christian Apologetics*, 346.

<sup>57</sup> 2 Peter 3:9 NASB.

God.”<sup>58</sup> This position “has compelled some persons to embrace universalism and, as a consequence, to deny the incarnation of Christ.”<sup>59</sup>

Further, there is a great deal to be learned from others. “Orthodox Christians should not be afraid to learn something from modernists...there is already a great amount of agreement among world religions on locality (for instance.)”<sup>60</sup> Exclusivism does not disengage one from his surroundings, nor from the truths that envelope him; they simply point to a singular Christ Who is above all others and Who stands solitarily as THE door to right relationship with God.

### **The Mediating Stance Between Necessities and Dangers**

When the necessity of Exclusivism within the Christian faith is compared with the dangers of that same Exclusivism, there has got to be a recognition that great care must be taken to avoid arrogance and intentional offense. Dr. William Craig Lane stated “No orthodox Christian likes the doctrine of Hell or delights in anyone’s condemnation. I truly wish that Universalism was true, but it is not. My compassion towards those in other world religions is therefore expressed, not in pretending that they are not lost and dying without Christ, but in my supporting and making every effort myself to communicate to them the life-giving message of salvation through Christ.”<sup>61</sup> With that concept noted, Exclusivism then should be transformed into a motivating factor for evangelism and discipleship: not a reason to stay to oneself, but a motivation to bring others alongside who have not heard.

### **Conclusion**

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<sup>58</sup> Hick, *Philosophical Challenge*, 64.

<sup>59</sup> Craig, *Philosophical Challenge*, 41.

<sup>60</sup> Kreeft, *Christian Apologetics*, 346.

<sup>61</sup> Craig, *Philosophical Challenge*, 52.

Philip L. Quinn accurately stated,

Western Christianity has never been ignorant of religious diversity. Early Christianity had to make its way in the religious pluralistic environment of late antiquity. During the medieval period, Islam put cultural and military pressure on European Christendom. And Religious diversity has often been seen by Christians as an intellectual challenge to which a response must be made. Origen wrote *Contra Celsum* to defend Christianity against pagan critique. Thomas Aquinas wrote *Contra Gentiles* to make the case for the rationality of Christian belief. So Western Christianity has never been without a philosophical problem of religious diversity of some sort.<sup>62</sup>

When these above presented concepts of Exclusivism, Pluralism, Universalism, and Inclusivism are viewed in the light of Scripture, when the existing world is understood truly as a global village, and when cultural diversity demands a listening and perceptive ear to other forms of religion, the questions observed at the beginning of this essay come into significance. It thus becomes wise to ask these “five different questions ... regarding other religions [and thought systems]: 1) Are they true? 2) Are they good? 3) Are they salvific? 4) Are they educative? and 5) Are they useful?”<sup>63</sup>

Certainly there is some truth to be found in other manners of religion. Certainly goodness is also to be found in other religions. Definitely there is much education that can be acquired through other routes seeking for God. And there is a great deal of usefulness that can come out of other religions. However, when it comes to the point of salvation and relationship, there is none other than that found in Jesus Christ.

Deuteronomy 6:4 states, “שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד”, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” (NRSV) These factors should be sufficient to bring the Christian to a new and deeper understanding of and appreciation for the Exclusivism that he walks in and should correspondingly motivate him to “Go therefore

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<sup>62</sup> Quinn, *Philosophical Challenge*, 226.

<sup>63</sup> Kreeft, *Christian Apologetics*, 343.

and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV.

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