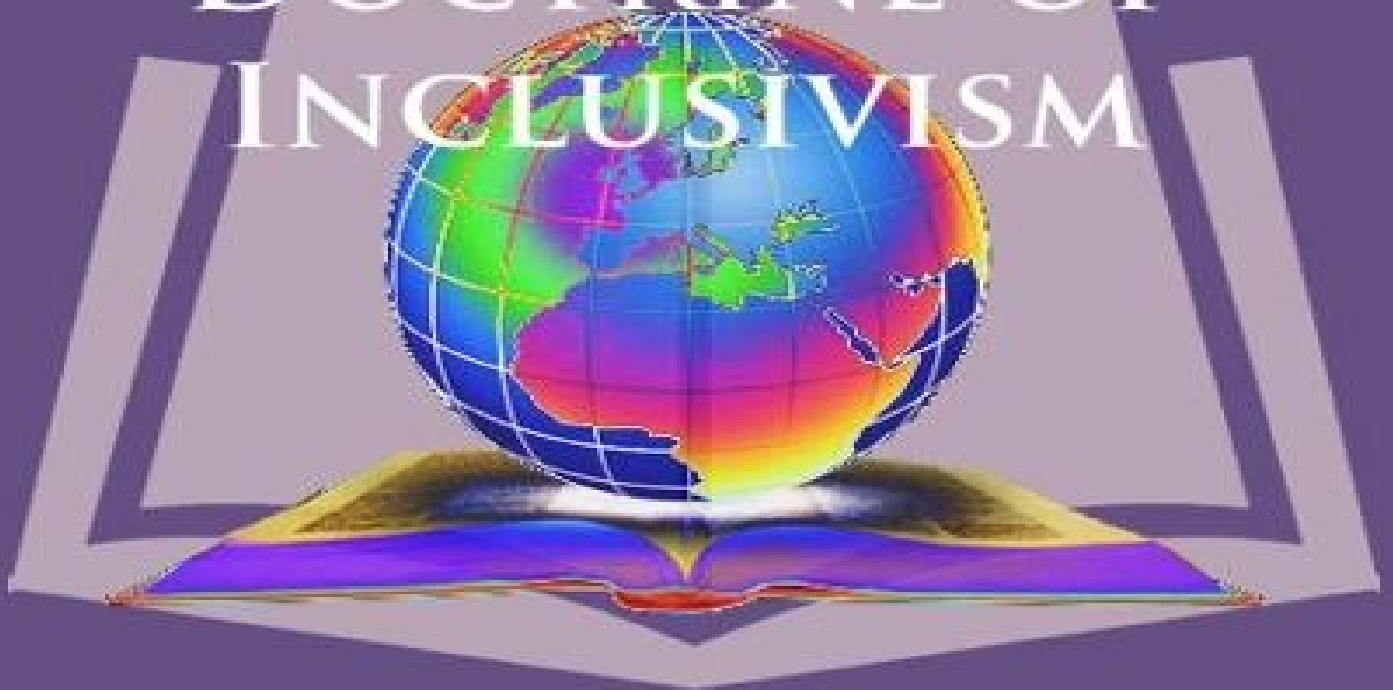
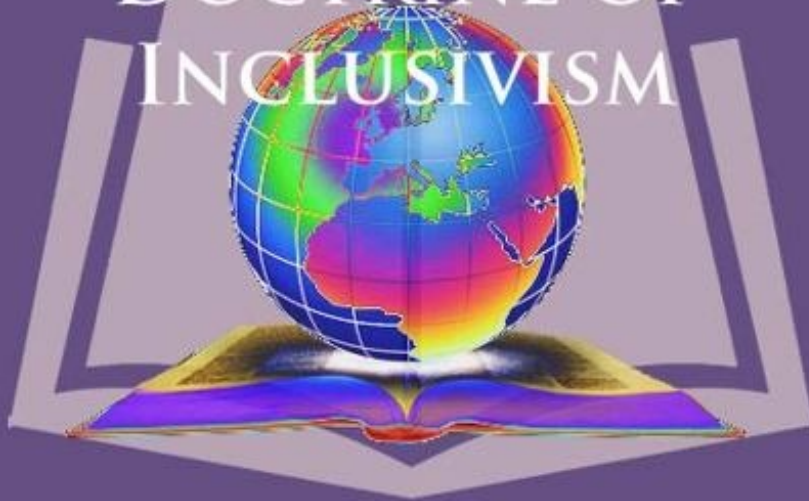


THE
"VERY PERNICIOUS
AND DETESTABLE"
DOCTRINE OF
INCLUSIVISM



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by Robert L. Reymond

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Introduction

....men, not professing the Christian religion, [cannot] be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the laws of that religion they do profess. And, to assert and maintain that they may, is very pernicious, and to be detested [Westminster Confession of Faith, 10.4]

There was a time in the not too distant past when evangelical leaders were in agreement regarding the eternal destiny of the unevangelized masses of mankind. Their commonly-held view was that people, absent

personal faith in Jesus Christ, are lost. This belief was one of the chief motives that drove the entire evangelical missionary enterprise. It was not at all uncommon to hear these leaders speak of a “lost and dying world” or an “unsaved world.” Today this view is called “exclusivism” in the sense that it restricts salvation *exclusively* to those who consciously trust Christ. But increasing numbers of spokesmen for evangelicalism today are stating either that such exclusivism simply is not Biblically defensible, or that the Bible is not clear about the eternal state of the adherents of other religions. They are opting for what they call “inclusivism,” the teaching that God’s mercy is so wide that it can and does embrace many, if not all, non-Christian religionists on the globe—a doctrine, as we have just read, that the seventeenth-century framers of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* described as “very pernicious” and “to be detested,” a judgment that the *Confession* is not inclined often to make, particularly with the adverb “very.” Before we look at this “downgrade” trend within Evangelicalism, I want to say something about this teaching within Theological Liberalism and Roman Catholicism.

Theological Liberalism’s Doctrine of Religious Pluralism

Theological liberalism’s doctrine of religious pluralism is best represented by John Hick, who first offers a too-facile, almost glib, explanation regarding how it came about that Jesus, though only a man, came to be regarded as God:

It was natural and intelligible both that Jesus, through whom men had found a decisive encounter with God and a new and better life, should come to be hailed as son of God, and later this poetry should have hardened into prose and escalated from a metaphorical son of God to a metaphysical God the Son.⁽¹⁾

Hick then argues that the “evolved” belief of the Christian church that Jesus is both God the Son incarnate and the only Savior of mankind

did little positive harm so long as Christendom was a largely autonomous civilization with only relatively marginal interaction with the rest of mankind. But with the clash between the Christian and Muslim world, and then on an ever broadening front with European colonization

throughout the earth, the literal understanding of the mythological language of Christian discipleship has had a diverse effect upon the relations between that minority of human beings who live within the borders of the Christian tradition and that majority who live outside it and within other streams of religious life.....

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 eternal life is Christian faith. It would follow from this that the large majority of the human race so far has not been saved..... Is not such an idea excessively parochial, presenting God in effect as the tribal deity of the predominantly Christian West?....

It seems clear that we are being called today to attain a global religious vision which is aware of the unity of all mankind before God....we must affirm God's equal love for all men and not only for Christians..... If, selecting from our Christian language, we call God-acting-towards-man the Logos, then we must say that all salvation, within all religions is the work of the Logos..... But what we cannot say is that all who are saved are saved by Jesus of Nazareth. The life of Jesus was one point at which the Logos....has acted..... From now onwards....we have to present Jesus....in a way compatible with our new recognition of the validity of the other great world faiths as being also, at their best, ways of salvation. We must therefore not insist upon Jesus being always portrayed within the interpretative framework built around him by centuries of Western thought. (2)

Christians, of course, should normally support *legal* tolerance toward other world religions, that is to say, they should actively support laws that adequately protect the rights of the individual to profess, practice, and propagate his religious views, with due allowance, of course, for the protection of the citizenry from excesses of religious fanaticism that would inflict bodily harm upon others. Christians should also cultivate in themselves and encourage in others *social* tolerance toward other faiths of the world, that is to say, they should respect other world faiths and seek to understand them and to encourage the same in others toward the Christian faith. But when it comes to *intellectual* tolerance, that is, the

cultivation of a mind so broad that it can tolerate every religious view as of equal truth without ever detecting anything in any of them to reject, this “is not a virtue; it is the vice of the feeble-minded.” (3) *It begs the entire question of truth.* For if Jesus is in truth both God incarnate (*Acts 20:28; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; 2 Peter 1:1; John 1:1, 18; 20:28; 1 John 5:20*) and the only Savior of mankind, as the Bible teaches us he is, and if the Church would be governed by truth, it must continue to insist that Jesus is *uniquely God*. Historically, his uniqueness resides in his birth, his sinless life and sacrificial death, his resurrection and ascension, his present session at the Father’s right hand, and his return as the eschatological Judge and Savior of mankind. Theologically, his uniqueness resides in his deity, the incarnation, the atonement, and the several aspects of his exaltation. Therefore, the Church must continue to proclaim Jesus as *the only saving way* to the Father, as he said (*John 14:6*), his *the only saving name* among men, as Peter said (*Acts 4:12*), and his *the only saving mediation* between God and man, as Paul said (*1 Timothy 2:5*). Furthermore, the Church must declare that the goal the religious pluralist so devoutly seeks—a universal religious brotherhood binding all men everywhere joyously together in one world of common humanity—is, on his grounds, unobtainable, not only because such pluralism does not transform the human heart, but also because *only the truth deserves to be universally proclaimed and universally received*. Without truth, which by its nature is exclusive, unique, and final, there can be no universal significance or power in the pluralist’s appeal, and his appeal is bound to fail. And any religious unity, if it is achieved, will have to be finally imposed upon men against their will (see *Revelation 13:11-17*).

To abandon Biblical Christological teaching in favor of a religious pluralism, if Christ is indeed uniquely God incarnate, is tantamount to the gravest breach of the First Commandment, and it will involve one in unspeakable infidelity to Jesus Christ the Lord of Glory who, according to Holy Scripture, wears a diadem out-rivaling all the diadems of all the world’s great religious and political leaders. To do so, in a word, would mean that the Church has simply ceased to be Christian at all! The Christian Church can afford to follow the modern call for intellectual religious pluralism only at the greatest cost to itself and to the world to

which Christ, the King and Lord of the Church, commissioned it to go (*Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8*). Moreover, to follow this call would be to set the Church on a course that can only lead it to religious frustration and failure, and in the end to divine judgment.

Rome's Doctrine of Inclusivism

The Church of Rome has long endorsed the inclusivist position. Karl Rahner (1904-1984), a leading Roman Catholic "inclusivist," who coined the phrase, "anonymous Christian," by which he meant a non-Christian who gains salvation through faith, hope, and love by the grace of Christ that is mediated imperfectly through his non-Christian religion, wrote in his *Theological Investigations*:

Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must already be regarded in this or that respect as an anonymous Christian.... The proclamation of the gospel does not simply turn someone absolutely abandoned by God and Christ into a Christian, but turns an anonymous Christian into someone who now also knows about his Christian belief in the depths of his grace-endowed being by objective reflection and in the profession which is given a social form in the Church. (4)

If Rahner were correct, the world would be seeing large numbers of these Gospel-enlightened "anonymous Christians" moving out of their religions and into Christianity because of the spread of the Gospel throughout the world by means of the mass media. But there is no evidence that this is happening. Indeed, according to John, far from being "already saved" when the Gospel comes to them, non-Christians are "condemned already" because they do not have faith in Christ (*John 3:18*).

Then in paragraph 836 of its 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Roman Catholic Church declares: "...to [the Catholic Church], in different ways, belong or are ordered: the Catholic faithful, others who believe in Christ, and finally *all mankind*, called by God's grace to salvation" (emphasis supplied). By this pronouncement the Roman Catholic Church has irremediably defined ("deconstructed" would be the more appropriate term) its catholicity for modern and future times in

such a way that it already ultimately includes everyone. By what one may regard as an ever-enlarging series of concentric circles Rome has redefined the church in order to justify this catechetical affirmation. Not only, says the *Catechism*, are those in the church who are “joined in the visible structure...[and who are ruled] by the Roman Pontiff and the bishops” (?837), but also those are in the church who “believe in Christ and have been properly baptized” even though they stand “in a certain, although imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church” (?838). Here the *Catechism* refers to all the baptized “separated brethren” throughout the world, including both the baptized members of the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches and the baptized members of all the Protestant churches (Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, etc.). In a word, then, the Roman Catholic Church claims that all baptized people within professing Christendom belong to its communion. Never mind that most, at least, of these non-Catholic communions repudiate this declared association. Never mind that many, if not most, of these baptized people are simply nominal members of state churches. Never mind that many, if not most, of these baptized people never go to church. Never mind that many, if not most, of them never give a penny to the spread of the true Gospel and never pray a moment for the church’s health. They are, according to Rome, still related salvifically to the People of God and may go to Heaven!

The *Catechism* goes on to state that even “those who have not received the gospel are related to the People of God in several ways” (?839). Because the faith of the Jewish People-catechetically described as the “the first to hear the Word of God”-“unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God’s revelation in the Old Covenant” (?839), (5) because to the Jews belong all the privileges outlined in *Romans* 9:4-5 (?839), and because with Christians they “await the coming of the Messiah” (?840), the People of God encompass the Jewish people. Never mind that the Jewish people for the most part deny the deity of Jesus Christ and thus the doctrine of the Trinity. Never mind that they for the most part rejected their Messiah, Jesus Christ, the first time he came, as a misguided prophet at best and a blasphemer at worst, and accordingly believe today that Christians are idolaters because we worship him whom they contend was simply a man. Never mind that they see no need for

Christ's substitutionary atonement. According to Rome's teaching they are still related salvifically to the People of God and may go to Heaven! (6)

The *Catechism* then declares that because Muslims "acknowledge the Creator,...profess to hold the faith of Abraham [they do not hold Abraham's faith, of course; they are spiritual Ishmaelites], and together with [Christians]...

adore the one merciful God [Muslims and Christians do not "adore" the same "one merciful God"]," they too are included within the plan of salvation (?841). Never mind that the Muslims' Allah is neither the tri-personal Yahweh of the Old Testament nor the triune God of the New Testament, but rather was originally a tribal deity-one in a pantheon of some three hundred-fifty false gods worshiped at Mecca-that Muhammad worshiped and "universalized" by force. Never mind that they think Christians believe their Trinity is composed of Allah, Mary, and their human offspring, Jesus. Never mind that they make Jesus' place in revelational history penultimate to Muhammad's ultimate place. Never mind that they deny both that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God and that he died on the cross and rose again. Never mind that they believe that Christians are idolaters because we worship Christ who they contend was only a human prophet. Never mind that they see no need for Christ's substitutionary atonement. According to Rome's teaching, they are still salvifically related to the People of God and may go to Heaven!

The *Catechism* goes on to state, in fact, about all the adherents to the world's non-Christian religions, "because all stem from the one stock which God created..., and also because all share a common destiny, namely God," that God's "providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend" to them as well (?842). Moreover, "all goodness and truth found in these religions" are "a preparation for the gospel and given by him who enlightens all men that they may at length have life" (?843). Accordingly, Peter Kreeft, a convert from the Christian Reformed Church to Roman Catholicism, in his book, *Ecumenical Jihad* (Ignatius, 1996), without fear of any ecclesiastical reprisal, does not hesitate to describe an out-of-body experience that he alleges he had, during which he met not only Orthodox Christians, Evangelical Christians, and Jews in Heaven,

but also Muhammad, Buddha, and Confucius. Never mind that God is not the “common destiny” of all mankind, given the fact, as the Bible teaches, that every man has one of two destinies, either Heaven with God or Hell with the devil and his angels. Never mind that all the religions of the world with the exception of Biblical Christianity are demonic or manmade, all of them being the products of fallen mankind’s perversion and suppression of the truth revealed in general revelation. And never mind that these world religions run the gamut from the crudest forms of animism, voodooism, and paganism, in which cannibalism and human sacrifice are practiced, through the multitude of world cults, to the Eastern religions of desired non-existence as in the case of Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. According to Rome’s teaching, their adherents are still related salvifically to the People of God and may go to Heaven. What is this but just ecclesiastical expansion with a vengeance, accomplished simply by redefining the boundaries of the church in order to include all mankind! What is this really but wholesale capitulation on Rome’s part to the world’s strident clamor for the Christian church to give up its alleged “triumphalist” claim to the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ as the only saving way to God and to acknowledge other religions as also acceptable ways to God!(7) By diminishing Christ, the Roman Church exalts itself.

Apart from its completely un-Biblical stance, what is the implication of Rome’s catechetical teaching that the peoples of the world have no absolute need to hear about Christ in order to be saved, and that as long as they sincerely follow the dictates of their conscience they may be saved? Well, this teaching implies, since non-Catholics, indeed, non-Christians, according to Rome’s dogmatic declarations and catechetical instruction, may go to Heaven without becoming Christian in any of its myriad forms, that for their salvation the Roman Catholic Church as a Christ-professing institution does not need to exist. By its own statements, therefore, *the Roman communion has declared its own theological obsolescence and itself a modern irrelevancy to most of the peoples of the world.*

These catechetical deliverances are but just one more expression among many others of the detestable apostasy that now grips the largest cult-the

Marian cult-within professing Christendom. And what is so tragically ironic about this “very pernicious and detestable” teaching of Rome’s 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is that it reasserts on the one hand the Council of Trent’s medieval doctrine of justification through faith and works and on the other makes the entire Tridentine doctrine irrelevant by teaching that all sincere people may be saved, whatever their faith or lack of it. So by its catechetical deliverances everything that modern Rome teaches about the way of salvation through Christ is short-circuited. Frankly, who should care what Rome teaches about Christ if everyone may be saved simply by sincerely following the good as he conscientiously understands and does the good? Apparently, even the sincere professing atheist who has not arrived at an explicit knowledge of God may be saved as long as he follows the dictates of his conscience with sincerity, for by responding to the light of conscience he is responding (without knowing it, Rome would say) in a salvific way to Christ’s Church. I can only say that the modern framers of these documents had better be glad that they were not born in the sixteenth century. The Romanist authorities living then would have burned them-including the present pope-at the stake for teaching such rank heresy!

Evangelicalism’s Doctrine of Inclusivism

Clark H. Pinnock, a leading advocate of inclusivism, while he insists that Christ is indeed the only Savior of men, writes: “We do not need to think of the church as the ark of salvation, leaving everyone else in hell; we can rather think of it as the chosen witness to the fullness of salvation that has come into the world through Jesus.”(8) In his article, “Toward an Evangelical Theology of Religions,”(9) urging what he calls the “particularity axiom” that God’s saving grace comes only through Jesus Christ; and the “universality axiom” that God’s saving grace is for the entire race because he desires the salvation of all mankind, Pinnock embraces the notion that people of faith from other religions will be saved by Christ even though they do not know him or believe in him.

Others, along with Pinnock, while they acknowledge that Christ is and always will be mankind’s only Savior, also argue that Christ will save many who have never heard of him through the revelation of God in nature. John Sanders, a Wesleyan thinker, supports this inclusivist hope

that people who never hear about Christ can be saved by exercising trust in God as he has revealed himself in general revelation.(10) Millard Erickson even lays out what he thinks are the five essential elements of this “gospel message” in nature:

1)The belief in one good powerful God. 2) The belief that he (man) owes this God perfect obedience to his law. 3) The consciousness that he does not meet this standard, and therefore is guilty and condemned. 4) The realization that nothing he can offer God can compensate him (or atone) for this sin and guilt. 5) The belief that God is merciful, and will forgive and accept those who cast themselves on his mercy.(11)

”May it not be,” Erickson queries, “that if a man believes and acts on this set of tenets he is redemptively related to God and receives the benefits of Christ’s death, whether he consciously knows and understands the details of that provision or not?” (12)

John Stott is a spokesman for the agnostic position. He believes that all men outside of Christ are lost, but with regard to the question of the final annihilation (Stott’s view of “eternal punishment”) of those who have never heard of Christ he writes: “I believe the most Christian stance is to remain agnostic on this question..... The fact is that God, alongside the most solemn warnings about our responsibility to respond to the Gospel, has not revealed how he will deal with those who have never heard it.” (13) Timothy Philips, Aida Besançon Spencer, and Tite Tienou likewise assume an agnostic stance here, stating that they “prefer to leave the matter in the hands of God.” (14)

These are representative speakers for this growing downgrade trend within Evangelicalism, cited here for the purpose of providing a sampling of the inclusivist sentiments being urged by many at the highest levels of academic Evangelicalism. But now we must ask: Can people be saved through general revelation? Will any man, on the basis of general revelation, arrive at the set of tenets Erickson lays out? Are the Scriptures silent, as the agnostic inclusivists imply, about the eternal destiny of those who do not hear about and put their trust in Christ? I would respond in the negative to all three questions and will now give my reasons for this conviction.

General Revelation Condemns, not Saves

According to Holy Scripture, all men—Jews and Gentiles, “good” men and “bad” men, the pagans in the Far East as well as the pagans in the industrialized West—sinned in Adam and are by their own acts of sinfulness continually falling short of the glory of God (*Romans 3:23*). The wages of this sin is death (*Romans 6:23*). And in spite of the fact that all peoples and cultures have received general revelation and hence possess an innate awareness of God’s eternal power and divine nature (*Romans 1:19-20*), his moral law (*Romans 2:14-15*), and the deserts of sin (*Romans 1:32*), they neither glorify God as God nor are they thankful to him (*Romans 1:21*), but pervert their knowledge of God in unspeakable forms of idolatry (*Romans 1:23*). Far from loving God and his Christ, the peoples of this world love darkness and hate the light of Christ’s Gospel because their deeds are evil (*John 3:19-20*). Consequently, God has abandoned (*paredoken*) the world to sexual impurity, shameful lusts, and a depraved mind (*Romans 1:24, 26, 28*). Far then from saving the world, general revelation serves as the ground of God’s just condemnation of the world. God views the entire world as “under sin.” “There is no one righteous, not even one” (*Romans 3:9-10*). All are dead in trespasses and sins (*Ephesians 2:1*). All are by nature children of wrath (*Ephesians 2:3*). All are “already” under condemnation (*Romans 3:19-20*). All are alienated from the life of God (*Ephesians 4:18*), ignorant of the truth of God (*Romans 1:25*), hostile to the law of God (*Romans 8:7*), disobedient to the will of God (*Titus 3:3*), fall short of the righteous demands of God (*Romans 3:23*), and subject to the wrath of God (*John 3:19*).

These statements describe the peoples of the world who have never heard the Gospel and who have never had a chance to accept or reject the Gospel of Christ. From the Biblical perspective, then, there is really no such thing as the “noble savage,” Rahner’s “anonymous Christian,” or the “holy pagan.” Such concepts exist only in the imaginations of unbelieving anthropologists and socio-logists and certain Roman Catholic and evangelical inclu-sivists. In short, men are lost and under God’s judgment, not only because they may have heard about and then rejected Christ at some point in their lives, but also and more primarily because they are sinners by nature and by practice, who have failed to live in

accordance with the light of the law of God which they all possess. They have sinned against God's revelation without, the demands of his law written on their hearts within, and their own accusing consciences (*Romans 2:14-15*).

So much for any unregenerate person ever responding to Millard Erickson's five tenets of general revelation as he set them forth. The Bible is clear that, apart from God's special wooing, the natural man is unable to discern, to love, to choose the things that are pleasing to God, or to love God (*Jeremiah 13:23; John 6:44, 65; 15:4-5; Romans 8:7-8; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 12:3; James 3:8; Revelation 14:3*).

The New Testament Repudiates Inclusivism

The New Testament teaches the necessity of conscious trust in Christ for salvation. Jesus Christ declared: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (*John 14:6*). He also taught that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations (*Luke 24:46-47*). Peter emphatically states: "Salvation is found in no one else [not Buddha, not Muhammad, not even Moses] by which we must be saved" (*Acts 4:12*). John not only declares: "No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (*1 John 2:23*); but he also emphatically states: "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (*1 John 5:12*). And Paul declares with equal clarity: "...there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus" (*1 Timothy 2:5*). He also writes in *Romans 10:13-15*:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [in the context, the Lord Jesus Christ] will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?

Note here the unbreakable connection that Paul makes by this series of questions between "calling on," "believing in," "hearing about," "preaching to," and "being sent." A preacher must be sent to the unsaved, and he must *preach* about Christ to them if they are to *hear* about

him, *believe* in him, and *call* on him for salvation. The clear implication of these rhetorical questions is that if missionaries are not sent to preach the Gospel of Christ to those who have not heard about him in order that they may *hear* about him, *believe* in him, and *call* upon his name for salvation, these unevangelized, who are condemned already, will remain unsaved and cannot and will not be saved by any other means.

While the missionary is *nothing* in himself insofar as the success of his mission labors are concerned, according to *1 Corinthians 3:5-7*, his work is the providentially *necessary* link between Christ's saving work and the salvation of men. That is to say, while the missionary in himself is of no importance, his mission work is of the *greatest* importance, for what he does, in and by God's animating and enabling, becomes a mighty weapon "to demolish the strongholds" of argumentation and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and "to take captive" every thought to make it obedient to Christ (*2 Corinthians 10:3-4*).

Paul also expressly declared with regard to the destiny of men who do not trust Christ: "All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law" (*Romans 2:12*). In Paul's mind all of mankind may be divided into two groups: those who sin *apart from* the law and those who sin *under* the law. That is to say, some human beings sin apart from the specially revealed law of God; others sin living under the specially revealed law of God; but *all in both groups sin and thus bring upon themselves the liability of divine condemnation*. About these two groups John Murray commented:

The contrast is...between those who were outside the pale of special revelation and those who were within [that pale].

With reference to the former the apostle's teaching is to the following effect: (1) Specially revealed law is not the precondition of sin—"as many as have sinned without the law". (2) Because such are sinners they will perish. The perishing referred to can be none other than that defined in the previous verses as consisting in the infliction of God's wrath and indignation and endurance of tribulation and anguish in contrast with the glory, honor, incorruption, and peace bestowed upon the heirs of eternal

life. (3) In suffering this perdition they will not be judged according to a law which they did not have, namely, specially revealed law-they “shall also perish without the law.” There is, therefore, an exact correspondence between the character of their sin as “without the law” and the final destruction visited upon them as also “without the law.” (15)

But take note: *Paul unequivocally declares that those who have never come within the pale of special revelation, particularly the proclamation of the Gospel-will still perish!* So the Bible is not silent about the destiny of those who have never heard the Gospel.

We should finally notice in this connection that the fourteen-point indictment and conviction that Paul brings against the entire human race in *Romans 3:9-20* establishes that all people-both Jews and Gentiles-are under the power of sin and, unless something alters their condition, they will be speechless someday before the judgment bar of God. Therefore, in *Romans 3:21-28* Paul sets forth faith in Christ’s atoning death as the only solution to the universal problem of divine condemnation for sin. Faith in Christ’s atoning death is not simply a way that God forgives human sin. It is the *only* basis on which God, according to Paul, justifies any sinner (*Romans 3:28*).

In sum, the atoning work of Christ’s doing and dying is not merely for Jews or merely for one nation or tribe or language family. It is the one and only way for anyone to come into fellowship with God. Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection stand on the cutting edge of the mission message in the book of *Acts*, and conscious personal faith in him is everywhere declared as essential to a person’s justification before God.

Rebuttal of Evangelical Inclusivism

Evangelical inclusivists deny that conscious faith in Jesus Christ is absolutely essential to salvation primarily for the following three reasons:

First, they contend that Jews in the Old Testament were saved apart from conscious faith in Jesus Christ, that is to say, they had only the “form” of the Christian Gospel without its New Testament “content.” But theirs is a false premise based upon dispensational thinking. While it is true that the

elect Jews of the Old Testament would not have known myriad details about the Christ of the New Testament, such as the name of his mother and step-father or even his human name, they did understand that the Messiah who was to come would die in their stead as their substitute and that they had to place their trust in his anticipated doing and dying for them for their salvation. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* quite correctly declares that the Covenant of Grace was administered in the Old Testament

...by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, *all foreshadowing Christ to come*; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, *to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah*, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation [7.5; see also 8.6].

I do not have time here to develop this particular rebuttal further, but I can refer you to my *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* for the fuller argument. (16)

Second, they rely upon what they view as the Biblical tradition of “holy pagans” who were saved even though they held to religious faiths other than the Yahwism and Messianism of the Old Testament. They refer here specifically to Melchizedek, Job, Jethro the Midianite priest and Moses’ father-in-law, Naaman the Syrian, the eastern Magi, and the Roman centurion Cornelius. But a careful reading of the Biblical accounts regarding these men will demonstrate that they were hardly “holy pagans” who were saved even though they worshiped false gods. King Melchizedek was both a priest of “the most high God, owner of Heaven and Earth,” whom Abraham identifies as Yahweh (*Genesis* 14:22), and *the* Old Testament type of the New Testament Messiah’s kingly priesthood (*Psalms* 110:4; *Hebrews* 7-10). He was certainly a worshiper of the one living and true God, and he doubtless trusted in God’s saving provision for him. Job too was a worshiper of Yahweh (*Job* 1:21) who trusted in God’s Redeemer (*Job* 19:25). Jethro, while he was quite likely at one time a worshiper of pagan gods, through his relationship to Moses was brought to faith in Yahweh (*Exodus* 18:8-12), as was Naaman as well (*2 Kings* 5:15-18). And while the eastern Magi were probably pagan

astrologers before their observance in the East of Messiah's special star, from that point on they gave themselves to the task of finding the "king of the Jews" and worshiping him (*Matthew* 2:2, 10-12). We may be sure that the Holy Spirit instructed and directed all these people to place their faith in the future atoning work of the Messiah in their behalf.

Cornelius the Roman centurion is a special showcase for the inclusivist. Pinnock describes him as "the pagan saint *par excellence* of the New Testament,"(17) and hails him as the prime example of a man who was saved apart from faith in Christ, to whom Peter was sent only to inform him that he was forgiven and saved. Inclusivists underscore the fact that Cornelius was a "devout and God-fearing man" (*eusebes kai phoboumenos ton theon*) who "gave generously to those in need and who prayed to God regularly" (*Acts* 10:2) and that he was a "righteous and God-fearing man [*aner dikaios kai phoboumenos ton theon*] who is respected by all the Jewish people" (*Acts* 10:22), about whom God declared to Peter that he was "clean" (*ekatharisen*; *Acts* 10:15). And they underscore that Peter plainly declares that "God does not show favoritism but accepts men in every nation who fear him and do what is right" (*Acts* 10:34-35).

Now it is true that Luke says all these things about Cornelius. But Luke's statements do not mean that Cornelius was a saved man prior to Peter's visit, for in fact he was not! I say this for the following two reasons: (1) Peter expressly declared later that it was by the message (*rhemata*) that he brought to Cornelius that "everyone who believes in [Christ] receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (*Acts* 10:43) that Cornelius was saved (see Peter's "shall be saved," *sothese*, the future indicative passive) (*Acts* 11:14). (2) The Jewish Christians of Jerusalem responded to Peter's explanation by saying: "Then God has even granted the Gentiles repentance unto life" (*Acts* 11:18), clearly meaning that true repentance leads to eternal life and that until God grants such to people they do not have eternal life. Clearly, then, before Peter came and preached Christ to him, Cornelius was not saved, and just as clearly it was through Peter's preaching that Cornelius came to faith in Christ.

But while this is true, it needs to be said that, *prior to* Peter's coming, Cornelius was "clean" in the sense that Peter was not to view him any

longer as ceremonially “taboo” but as a legitimate candidate for evangelization!(18) This is plainly Peter’s own interpretation of the “great sheet” vision in *Acts* 10:28-29 where we read: “Peter said to them: ‘You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me [by the “clean sheet” vision] that I should not call any man [ceremonially] impure or unclean [that is, an “untouchable”]. So when I was sent for, I came without raising an objection.’” It is also true that God had “accepted” (*dektos*) Cornelius before Peter spoke to him. But what does this mean? This “acceptance” by God is not the same thing as the earlier “clean” for the “clean” are all men everywhere whereas the “accepted” are said to be *in* every nation. The “accepted” *in* every nation, then, are they, in God’s providence, who seek God sincerely and genuinely, as did Cornelius the “God-fearer” as he listened to the reading of the Old Testament in the Jewish synagogues, and for whom God arranges, as he did for Cornelius, that the Gospel should be brought to them. Which is just to say, the “accepted” in every nation are simply God’s elect. Cornelius is representative, then, not of people who can and are saved apart from faith in Christ (there is none!), but of the unsaved elect in every nation throughout the world who by the Spirit’s promptings are drawn, by God’s electing love and by whatever bit of special revelation they might have received, to realize (1) that they as needy sinners must meet the one living and true God someday; (2) that they are unable to answer him once in a thousand times satisfactorily; and (3) who pray day and night that God in his mercy will somehow make it possible for them to be acceptable in his sight. These, the Cornelius incident teaches us, God will save through the mission enterprise by getting the good news of the Gospel to them just as he arranged for Peter to take the Gospel to Cornelius.

Third (and the inclusivist’s previous two reasons grow out of this more fundamental error), evangelical inclusivists believe that “people are saved by faith, not by the content of their theology.” (19) Pinnock declares: “Faith in God is what saves, not possessing certain minimum information [about Christ].... A person is saved by faith, even if the content of faith is deficient....The issue God cares about is the direction of the heart, not the content of theology.” (20) In sum, according to Pinnock and inclusivists in general, it is not *what* one believes about God that counts; what counts

is *that* he believes in God. Said another way, people are saved, not by the object of their faith, but by their mental act of faith in God.

Here we have reached the nadir of inclusivist thinking. But surely saving faith must be directed not to an idolatrous and pagan substitute for God but to the one living and true God who is the Triune God and who has declared that no one can approach him except through the saving work of his Son's saving work. And one learns this through hearing Gospel preaching. Moreover, this psychological act of faith, originating as these Arminian thinkers contend it does, in man's determination and will, constitutes a sinful work that cannot save and is everywhere condemned by Holy Scripture. It bears repeating: The act of believing *per se* does not and cannot save. Faith's value depends upon its object. Speaking more precisely, it is not even faith in Jesus Christ that saves. It is Jesus Christ who saves the sinner who places his trust in him. And I must underscore again, as I said earlier in my discussion of Roman Catholic inclusivism, that to the degree that the evangelical inclusivist believes that people of other religions may be saved apart from a conscious knowledge of Christ, just to that same degree are they implying that the evangelical faith is irrelevant and obsolete. And that implication, regardless of the degree to which one may espouse it, is a direct attack upon the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ, the only Savior of the world!

Conclusion

The Bible is solicitous that Christians understand that the nations are lost, unsaved, and perishing without God. They are under divine condemnation, not just because they have never heard of Christ, but more primarily because they are transgressors of God's holy law. Christians should pray that God will melt their own hearts and remove all that would blind their eyes that they may see their world as it really is—a world on a collision course with the flames of divine judgment! And they should pray that God will empower them and send them to that world with the “good news” of his redeeming love in Christ who is the only true Savior of mankind.

As I bring this essay to a close I feel compelled to ask now the following question: If you and I really believe that the world's masses must,

individually and personally, consciously trust Jesus Christ's doing and dying if they would be saved from the wrath of God, what are we personally doing to bring that message to them? I would remind you that Christ, the Lord of the Church, declared: "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (*Matthew 9:37*; see *Luke 10:2*). He also stated: "Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest?' I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (*John 4:35*).

Let us be clear about the spiritual condition of these "fields ripe for harvest." We may not like it, we may instinctively recoil against it, but the Bible wants us to realize (and to act on this realization) that these "ripe fields" are the multitudes of lost, unsaved peoples of this world, perishing without a saving knowledge of Christ. They are under divine condemnation, not just because they have never heard about Christ, but more primarily because they are sinners by nature, by habit, and by practice. Some of you may already be doing what you can to reach them with the good news of the Gospel, and I thank God for that. But if we are Christians we must all become involved in witnessing to friends and neighbors about Christ and doing what we can to spread the Gospel to the ends of the Earth, for repentance and forgiveness of sins must be preached in Christ's name to all nations (*Luke 24:47*) since salvation is to be found in no other name under Heaven than his (*Acts 4:12*). We must also be more faithful in supporting with our prayers and our money—even more than we have in the past—Christ-preaching, Bible-believing missionaries on the mission fields of the world. Which is just to say, if we cannot go ourselves, we must do what we can to enable others to go.

Now I want to relate a story. Some years ago I viewed the 1993 Academy Award movie of the year, *Schindler's List*, the Steven Spielberg story of Oskar Schindler, the Nazi war profiteer, who shortly after the German invasion of Poland in 1939 began to use the Jews of the Krakow ghetto as workers in his pots and pans factory. At first he saw them only as chattel to be used to line his own pockets, which he did quite successfully, becoming exceedingly rich. But as the war dragged on, and as he increasingly witnessed Nazi atrocities being inflicted against the Jews of

Poland, increasingly did he begin to use his own wealth to bribe Nazi officials and army officers to give him more and more Jews for his factory (that the Nazis had turned toward the end of the war into a munitions factory) and that, by Schindler's personal instructions, became a model of *non*-productivity in the Nazi war effort. Though it virtually bankrupted him personally, he saved over twelve hundred Jews from certain death in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

I recount this story line only to say that I was struck by some statements put in his mouth toward the end of the movie. The war had just ended, and having worked for the Third Reich, both he and his Jewish factory workers realized that the Allied authorities might search for him. As he bade them farewell, they presented him with a letter signed by each of them that they hope will help him before the Allied authorities.

At that moment Schindler suddenly became very sober and quietly said: "I could have done more. I could have done more!" He began to sob. "I could have done more. I didn't do enough. This car-why did I keep the car? Ten people right there. Ten people. Ten more people." Pulling off his lapel pin, he exclaimed, "The pin. Two people. This is gold. Two more people! One more. I could have bought more people! But I didn't."

As his words-"I could have done more! Why did I keep the car? Ten people right there. The pin. This is gold. Two more people. One more. I could have bought more people. But I didn't"- seared themselves into my mind as I sat in the darkness of that theater, I suddenly became convicted that many Christians-I among them-are going to be asking similar questions at the Great White Throne Judgment: "Why did I not do more to reach the lost for Christ? Why did I think I had to have that more expensive house, that more expensive car, that snowmobile, that ten-speed bicycle that hangs most of the time in my garage? Why did I not use more of my resources for the cause of Christ?" More poignantly, "Why was I not more committed to Christ's cause? Why did I esteem my own self-preservation so highly? Why was I not willing to go myself?" In that Great Day I fear that many of us will have no answers to salve our smitten consciences.

May God raise up in our day, while divine patience still grants us time, a

multitude of men and women who will boldly dare to go into this lost and dying world with the liberating works-free Gospel of God!

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1 . John Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate* (Philadelphia, 1977), ix. *My Jesus, Divine Messiah* (Scotland, 2003), demonstrates the shallowness of such an explanation.

2 . Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, 181-182. Ronald H. Nash provides a thorough exposition and refutation of Hick's religious pluralism in his *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids, 1994).

3 . John Stott, *The Authentic Christ* (Basingstoke, 1985), 70.

4 . Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* (New York, 1966), I:131-32.

5 . There is indeed a response—a negative one—to God's revelation in the Old Covenant, for which Paul declares: "They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last" (1 Thessalonians 2:15-16). Therefore, as he states in Romans 11:7-10: "What Israel sought so earnestly [that is, righteousness before God (Romans 9:31)] it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day." And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever." To suggest then that the faith of Christ-rejecting Jews is even remotely a proper response to the Old Testament revelation is surely an inaccurate appraisal of the situation. Can anyone truly believe the Old Testament and not acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Messiah, Savior, and Lord revealed in it? The real truth of the matter is that no Jew who has heard of Christ and his atoning work and then rejects him believes the Old Testament revelation. Jesus expressly declared: "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me" (John 5:46). In light of the fact that the only hope of salvation for Jews resides in the provisions

of the Christian Gospel, it is simply gross wrong-headedness to encourage or to support them in their 'Jewishness' or in their Zionist causes. Paul denounced every Jewish hope for acceptance before God that was founded on anything other than the imputed righteousness of Christ, which righteousness is received through faith alone in Christ's preceptive and penal obedience alone. And the sooner Christians realize this-that in order to win Jews to Christ they must, first, show them the futility of any and every hope for salvation that is related in any way to the fact that they have Abrahamic blood flowing in their veins (Matthew 3:9; John 1:13) or to the fact that they are circumcised (Romans 2:25-29; Galatians 5:2-5; 6:13) or to the fact that they are practicing sons and daughters of Torah (Romans 2:17-24; 3:9; Galatians 3:10; 4:21-5:1), and second, urge them to renounce any and every ethnic religious distinction in which they might rest their hope of salvation and to trust Christ alone-the sooner their witness to Jews will become effective.

[6](#) . For more on Islam's errors see my 'What's Wrong with Islam?' The Trinity Review, October/November 2002.

[7](#) . For more on this topic, see my A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith (Second edition; Nashville, 2002), 1085-1093.

[8](#) . Clark H. Pinnock, 'Acts 4:12-No Other Name Under Heaven,' in Through No Fault of Their Own, Crockett and Sigountos, eds. (Grand Rapids, 1991), 113. He contends for this position more fully in his A Wideness in God's Mercy (Grand Rapids, 1992).

[9](#) . Clark H. Pinnock, 'Toward an Evangelical Theology of Religions,' JETS 33/3 (September 1990), 359-368.

[10](#) . John Sanders, No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized (Grand Rapids, 1992).

[11](#) . Millard Erickson, 'Hope for Those Who Haven't Heard? Yes, but....,' Evangelical Missions Quarterly, Vol. 11, No. 2 (April 1975), 124. It remains to be seen, of course, whether any unregenerate sinner can or will come to these conclusions apart from Gospel proclamation. See also Evert D. Osburn, 'Those Who Have Never Heard: Have They No Hope?' JETS 32/3 (September 1989), 367-372).

[12](#) . Erickson, 'Hope for Those Who Haven't Heard? Yes, but....,' 125.

[13](#) . John Stott, Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue (Downers Grove, 1988), 327.

[14](#) . See Through No Fault of Their Own, 259, fn. 3.

[15](#) . John Murray, The Epistle to the Romans (Grand Rapids, 1968), 1:70.

[16](#) . Reymond, A New Systematic Theology, 503-544.

[17](#) . Pinnock, A Wideness in God's Mercy, 165.

[18](#) . In Old Testament times God had let the nations go their own way (Acts 14:16) as he prepared Israel to be the repository of special revelation and the racial originator of the Messiah, and during that time he had also overlooked the nations' ignorance (Acts 17:23) in the sense that he had taken no direct steps to reach them savingly. But once Christ came, God has commanded all people everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30) and to put their trust in him.

[19](#) . Pinnock, A Wideness in God's Mercy, 157.

[20](#) . Pinnock, A Wideness in God's Mercy, 158.