

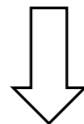
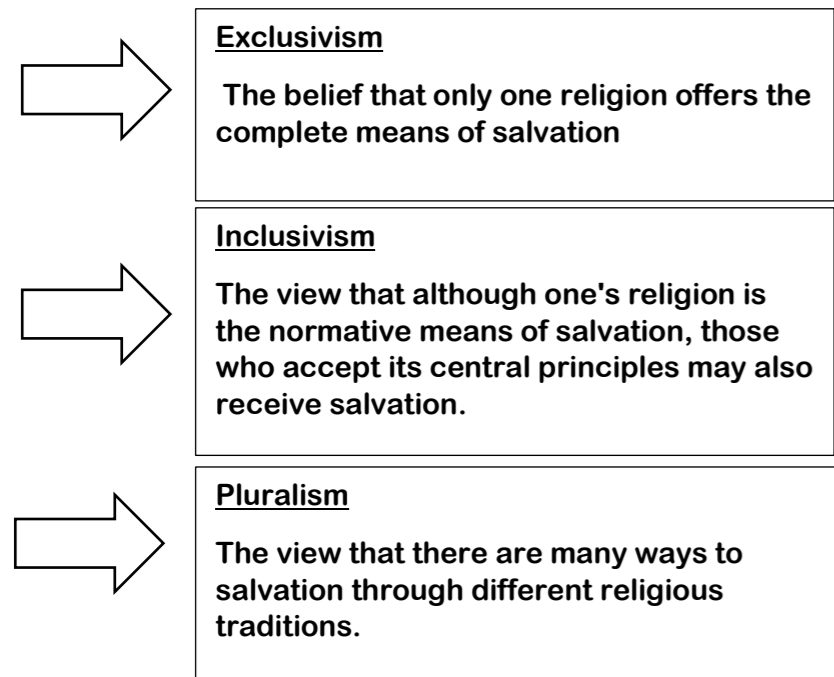
Religious pluralism and theology

This unit is grounded in the exploration of who is going to achieve salvation/ which path to salvation is correct. At the start of the Christian faith, believes had to decide where Christianity would fit, in an already multi faith society.



- ✓ The first Christians saw themselves as having a unique kind of relationship with God, made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- ✓ They did not see Christianity as an extra option for those who preferred a different kind of worship, but saw it as holding the key to salvation. They thought that they should try to convert as many people as possible to the Christian faith as an urgent task because, otherwise those people would miss out on salvation.
- ✓ Only conversion to Christianity could save people.

Alan Race identified three perspectives Christian may take.



Inter-faith dialogue: Sharing and discussing religious beliefs between members of different religious traditions, with an aim of reaching understanding.

These discussions would lead people to take a pluralist approach.

Exclusivism

Exclusivism- the name given to the belief that Salvation can only be achieved through Christianity, no other religions offers the right path to build the correct relationship with God.

- Jesus brought salvation to earth and his sacrificial death on the cross was unique event of cosmic significance.
- Only through hearing the Gospel (good news about the life and sacrifice of Christ) and respond to this in faith can people be saved.
- For some, this requires going through the rite/ sacrament of baptism.
- Can also be referred to as “particularist”.

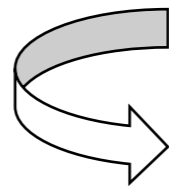
Narrow exclusivism- salvation is only possible for those of a particular denomination.



Augustine



Calvin



Both believe God elects through Grace only a small number of Christians. Simply belonging to the faith and adapting the beliefs is no guarantee of salvation.

Catholic Church-

“extra ecclesium nulla salus”

“There is no salvation outside the church”. Salvation is only possible for those baptised into the Catholic Church and those who regularly receive Eucharist in a catholic church.

However in the 1960s there was a shift in the way some Catholics think and as a denomination the Catholic Church began to taken a more outward looking approaching, recognising truth could be found outside of their specific theology.

“ many elements of sanctification and truth are found outside of its visible structure “.
Lumen Gentium

Broad Exclusivism

Gavin D’Costa: a “Universal access” exclusivist (in contrast to restrictive access...essentially narrow exclusivism). Salvation is available to all who have faith in Christ and some even believe it can be achieved AFTER death (link to purgatory in catholic theology)

“This is good, and pleases God our Savior,
4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” 1 Timothy

Hendrik Kraemer: Religions are whole belief systems and ways of life, They must be considered in their entirety. You cannot just pick out certain beliefs and gloss over others, simply to make links. Just because there are *some* overlaps, they are *not* the same.

Eg. Similar beliefs about treatment of other across religions.

“do to others what you would have them do to you,” – Christianity

“No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.” – Islam

Therefore, when considering religions as a whole Kraemer concluded that only Christians can achieve salvation, as it is the only religion which wholly accepts salvation offered by Christ.

Influence:

- ✓ Leading figure in the ecumenical movement in the Netherlands. The bringing together of different Christians denominations for intra faith dialogue and shared projects.
- ✓ Gave support to the importance of the work of Christian missionaries working in non-Christian countries , as he emphasised the message that in order to achieve salvation they must convert to Christianity.

Karl Barth 1886-1968

We cannot know God through our own efforts, only through the “Word of God” (theology of the word). Knowledge of God can only be found where God chooses to reveal his Word.

The word consists of three forms:

1. Jesus Christ
2. The Bible
3. The teachings of the Church

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

So was Barth an exclusivist?

Yes: He emphasises that Christ is central to Salvation.

No: He states God reveals himself how and when he chooses, leaving the possibility that God could reveal himself in other ways.

Inclusivism: The view that although one's religion is the normative means of salvation, those who accept its central principles may also receive salvation.

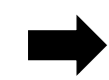
What Inclusivists actually believe can differ significantly?



Some maintain salvation is possible for an individual who turns to Christianity after death.



Some state God's Omni benevolence leaves open the possibility of salvation for non Christians. Non Christian religion hold a degree of truth and God's wisdom will mean he makes allowances for those who sincerely choose to follow him...just through the wrong religion .



Some take the view that the truth found in other religions is the work of Christ, even if people don't recognise it as such.



Karl Rahner (Catholic theologian)

- ✓ Christianity is the absolute religion.
- ✓ It is in a unique position in being the religion that is founded on God's ultimate act of revelation: His incarnation as Jesus.
- ✓ Christianity sets the standard by which all religions are measured.
- ✓ However, God is omnibenevolent and it would seem at odds with this if those alive prior to Jesus were unable to achieve salvation.
- ✓ Religions other than Christianity must offer some means of aiding their followers towards the saving Grace of God.
- ✓ God in Christ is able to offer salvation to those, through no fault of their own, have not been able to respond to God through Christ.
- ✓ There could be partial truth in Non Christian religions, whose followers did not know of Jesus.
- ✓ However, once someone is exposed to the knowledge of salvation through Christ they ought to become Christian and have no excuse to reject the gospel.
- ✓ Christianity holds the truth but the Grace of God makes allowances for those who have no access to the truth.

“no fault of their own, do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience- those too may achieve eternal salvation”

Lumen Gentium, 1964, Chapter 2.16

Kraemer would argue that non Christian religions are misguided attempts by people to find the truth for themselves. They are cultural constructs, not a response to the revelation of God in Christ.

Romans 2:14-16 is an example of scripture in which both Exclusivists and Inclusivists can find evidence for their perspectives.

“God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ.”



Exclusivists will argue this shows Jesus is central to salvation.

“The requirements of the law are written on their heart”



Inclusivists will argue this shows people can carry the principles of Christianity inwardly, even if outwardly they do not practice the faith. These people are worthy of salvation.

HOWEVER, Rahner would argue there can be some truth in non-Christian religions.

For example in the Old Testament people are praised for their faith, but these people have not had a chance to respond to Christ, because they lived prior to the incarnation. God will still recognise their genuine faith.

“I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth” **Job 19:25**

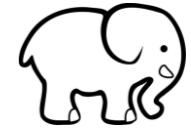
These people can be known as “anonymous Christians”. They may not be outwardly Christian (no baptism, bible or Church) but their behaviour and attitudes illustrate that they are turning to Christ without knowing it and they will not be excluded from salvation.

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat”

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats could be argued to demonstrate that anyone who treats others with altruistic love is working for Christ, whether they know it or not, so are worthy of salvation.



Pluralism: The view that there are many ways to salvation through different religious traditions. Pluralists tend to argue that different religions share the same ultimate goal. They are taking different paths to the same goal. Differences in faith and belief arise due to culture and the differences are just superficial.



The blind men and the elephant: a parable which originated in India which states that a group of blind men come across an elephant. Each man feels a different part of the elephant. Each has a unique understanding of the elephant and they argue, but ultimately they are all encountering the same elephant. So different religions are experiencing truth/ faith/ God differently, so have different understandings, practices etc. But they can all still be working to the same goal.

John Hick's pluralist views:



Whilst originally an evangelist exclusivist, Hick adapted his attitude when he encountered the charitable, family centred nature of other faiths. He questioned how an omnibenevolent God could exclude such people and condemn them due to their cultural heritage.

“Can we accept the conclusion that the God of love who seeks to save all mankind has nevertheless ordained that men must be saved in such a way that only a small minority can in fact receive this salvation?”
HICK

Hick was also inspired by Kant's understanding of how we see the world. Kant distinguished between the noumenal and phenomenal.

- ✓ **Noumenal:** the world as things really are.
- ✓ **Phenomenal:** the world as we see it. (We are going to have unique perspectives).

Noumenal the reality of how God truly is. **Phenomenal** the human construct if how we can understand God in accordance to our own contexts and cultural upbringings.

Hick maintained Christianity should not be understood as “the truth”, it has its flaws like every religion. He came to the conclusion that the normal truth claims / assertion made in Christianity (Jesus is the incarnation) should be understood as myth. Once such claims are understood as myth then the truth claims of different religions can be understood as symbols, each meaningful in their own context. A God of love would not organise the universe in a way that would limit salvation. Everyone can also continue their journey to “the real” after death.



Panikkar's Pluralist views:



- ✓ We should not be claiming different religions are offering different paths to the truth. We should not be claiming to know that there is truth and be open minded to this.
- ✓ Panikkar wanted to emphasise the mystery of the divine (he experienced many faiths in his life).
- ✓ Instead of destroying cultural diversity and different cultures in the attempt to find "the truth". We should aim to discover the truth by living it. Choosing actions and words with a vision of harmony and finding the essential nature of what it is to be human. Life is a searching pilgrimage.
- ✓ It is not enough just to respect other religions, but you ought to respect the freedom of God or whatever one understands to be the divine.

Views on Christ: Hick vs. Panikkar

- Hick- Jesus is mythical/ a symbolic way to understand God, but needs to be recognized as limited due to human flaws. Not the only way to understand God.
- Panikkar- Christ is not a specific individual, but a name for God revealing himself. Other religions have different words for this. Christophany- Christ being made plain to humans consciousness, but not actually limited to being achieved through Jesus.

Panikkar vs. Rahner (from inclusivism)

- Similar: Rahner's anonymous Christian idea can be seen similar to Panikkar's view that people can live a Christian "truth" without knowing it/ labelling it.
- Difference: However, Rahner clearly thought Christianity was of higher value, whereas Panikkar rejects a hierarchical view of religion.

Evaluation: Religious pluralism and theology

Criticisms of Exclusivism.

Revelation (scripture) requires interpretation.

This will lead to various uncertainties:

- Which words of the Gospels are direct from Jesus and which were crafted in order to communicate the Christian message?
- If there are different interpretations it seems wrong disqualifying people of other faiths for their own interpretation of revelation.

Strongest of Criticism of Exclusivism.

Surely it is unfair to only offer salvation to those who believe in the Christian gospel. Some people have far easier access to the Christian message (eg. Societies like Britain), compared to others who may have been raised with no awareness of the faith OR have been fully immersed in their own faith / culture. (Iran)

It would also exclude those who lived prior to Jesus. Surely their lack of faith is Jesus inevitable! (Think back to Rahner). Inclusivists and Pluralists think it is unacceptable that an omnibenevolent God would deny people salvation who have:

- Not had any/ or adequate exposure to Christianity.
- Have genuinely tried to find God in their own faith.

Why do some exclusivists think that their response/ attitude is so important?

Exclusivists firmly maintain there is only one path to salvation, which is through Christ. This sacrifice was a once-for-all event of cosmic significance and does not simply provide an alternative route to salvation.

Exclusivists maintain it is irrational to hold the views that more than one religion is true. They state different religions believe different things. (Eg. Monotheistic vs. Polytheistic religions). All religions could be wrong...but the most certainly cant be all right.

Exclusivists recognise that a relativist attitude, which is accepting and tolerant is the fashionable response in the modern day. But they state they should not be led by political correctness and should be not afraid of telling the truth on matters of ultimate truth. After all, it is of vital importance for everyone's eternal soul. **Therefore, the mission to convert others is their duty.**

Furthermore the views of Inclusivists and Pluralists would undermine the work of those who have sacrificed their lives for the Christian faith.

So how can be you be an exclusivist and still believe in an omnibenevolent God?

William Lane Craig said that God's omniscience also includes "middle knowledge". God knows everyone's heart. He knows what they would do if the circumstances were different, so God is able to know if that individual would have been Christian, given the chance. A bonus of this response is that it allows God to judge the souls of babies and children who have died vouna.

Issues with this response:

- It removes the urgency of the Christian mission to convert others.
- Does it limit free will?

Support for Inclusivism: Brendan Sweetman

Inclusivists maintain that people do not need to be aware they are following Christ in order to be saved.

"All that matters (metaphysically) is that Jesus did rise from the dead, and this act made salvation possible for all, irrespective of one's particular religion." Brendan Sweetman

Again this raises the question of whether mission work is worth while....If they can be saved anyway, should Christians try to save them?

Pluralist discussion points

Pluralists would argue that rather than assertions/ truth claims Christian claims such as "Jesus is truth" is their preferred way of looking at things. This Christian truth, rather than THE truth.

Why would an all loving God deny salvation to all humans?

As well as a being a God of love, Christians would maintain He is a God of justice.

"Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne." (Psalm 97:2)

God makes the opportunity of salvation available to everyone, if people don't want to take up this opportunity then they have chosen their own fate and cannot blame God for the consequence of their own choices.

Additionally it would be unjust for God to give salvation everyone. Eg. Hitler.

Will *all* good people be saved?

Many people struggle with the idea that well meaning, kind and honest people who are not Christians will be denied salvation. There are many examples (find one!) of individuals who have given their lives to charity and fighting for justice, even if not explicitly religious.

Are these people less deserving of salvation than someone who has accepted Christ but does not help others?

Is it faith, action or both which earns salvation?

Faith	<p>“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.” (John 3: 16-18)</p> <p>“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:6-9)</p>	Faith in Christ and God’s blessing / Grace will be enough to achieve salvation. Salvation is offered freely to those accept Christ and the Grace of God and seek forgiveness.
Action	<p>Parable of the Sheep and the Goats “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” (Luke 25: 34-36).</p>	God will judge humans based on their treatment of others rather than their adherence to particular doctrines.
Both	<p>Faith and Deeds ¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. ²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless^[a]? ²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,”^[b] and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.</p> <p>(James 2: 14-14)</p>	Faith is incomplete without the moral actions that faith inspires.

How can pluralism undermine Christian belief?

Pluralism presents a serious challenge to the belief that Jesus’s death and resurrection were unique events through which God made salvation possible.

Hick argues that many of the ideas central to there are a number of aspects of traditional Christianity that were open to serous doubt. For example:

- ✓ That God created the universe from nothing
 - ✓ The Doctrine of the Fall
- ✓ The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth
- ✓ The belief in heaven and hell

Hick wanted such ideas to be understood as non cognitive and mythical. They express the human relationship with God, but are not to be taken literally. Critics argue there would be nothing left of Christianity if you took this approach.

Questions to consider:

That what extent does a theological pluralist approach undermine the central doctrines of Christianity.

Non Christians who live morally good lives and genuinely seek God can be considered to be” anonymous Christians”. Discuss.

Christianity is not the only means to salvation. Discuss.

Critically assess the view that in Christian teaching all people will be saved.

“All religions lead to salvation” Critically assess.