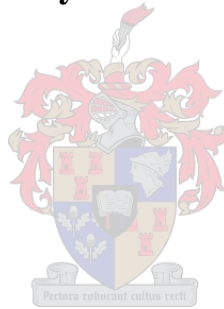


The Judgment of God and the Rise of ‘Inclusivism’ in Contemporary American Evangelicalism

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I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any University for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

This study offers an overview and critique of the growing movement in American evangelicalism of what is popularly known as “inclusivism.” The mounting uneasiness expressed in many evangelical circles in North America concerning the fate of the unevangelised, and how that may square with the traditional evangelical view of their lostness, has produced a vigorous Soteriology which means to address what is viewed as inadequacies in the traditional model of salvation found in the American evangelical community.

After an Introduction which defines the terms of the discussion, a systematic presentation of the main views of inclusivism is presented, mainly through the eyes of two of its foremost proponents, Clark Pinnock and John Sanders (although many others are also referenced). Major topics of coverage include the character and nature of God as supremely expressed in the teaching of Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit through non-Christian religions, and how a balance between the love of God and human freedom can be maintained. Inclusivism endeavours to distance itself both from modern pluralism and evangelical exclusivism, the latter the dominant soteriological position of American evangelicalism for the past several generations. Driven by a strong sense of the love of God, inclusivists contend that God will do anything he can to draw people to himself. While maintaining the particularity of Christ, inclusivists nonetheless see a universal outworking of Christ’s salvation, even to those people without epistemological awareness of Jesus’ atoning work. This works out in a greater appreciation for the salvific benefits of general revelation and non-Christian religions, resulting in a “wider hope” that more of humanity will be saved than is typically expected in exclusivism’s “fewness doctrine.”

After a presentation of the main views of inclusivism, a final section of this study is devoted to an evangelical evaluation. Is it an acceptable alternative to the traditional exclusivism of American evangelicalism? A systematic evaluation of the main tenets of inclusivism is presented, going through such areas as its Bibliology, Pneumatology, Christology, and Hamartiology, with a final look at its soteriological conclusions and the practical effects it may have on evangelical world missions. The main point of departure is seen in the area of the judgment of God, and how a “hermeneutic of judgment” is needed to properly counterbalance inclusivism’s “hermeneutic of hope.”

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie bied ‘n oorsig en kritiek op die groeiende beweging onder Amerikaanse evangelikalisme van wat populêr bekendstaan as “inklusivisme.” Die groeiende ongemak, uitgespreek in talle evangelikale kringe in Noord Amerika oor die toestand van die onge-evangeliseerdes, en hoe dit vergelyk met die tradisionele evangelikale beskouing oor hulle verlorenheid, het ‘n kragtige Soteriologie tot gevolg gehad. Dit beteken dat dit wat gesien word as ontoereikendheid in die tradisionele model van verlossing in die Amerikaanse evangelikale gemeenskap, aangespreek sal word.

Ná ‘n inleiding, wat die terminologie van die diskussie definieer, word ‘n sistematiese uiteensetting van die hoof-standpunte van die inklusivisme aangebied, hoofsaaklik volgens die beskouinge van twee van die hulle sterkste voorstanders, Clark Pinnock en John Sanders (hoewel daar ook na baie ander verwys word). Die belangrikste onderwerpe wat aanbespreek word sluit in: die eienskappe en natuur van God, soos hoofsaaklik uitgedruk in die leringe van Jesus, die werk van die Heilige Gees deur die nie-Christelike godsdienste, en hoe die ewewig tussen God se liefde en menslike vryheid behou kan word. Die inklusivisme poog om dit te distansieer van beide moderne pluralisme en evangelikale eksklusivisme, terwyl laasgenoemde die oorwegende soteriologiese standpunt in Amerikaanse evangelikale kringe was vir verskeie geslagte van evangelikales. Aangespoor deur ‘n sterk bewustheid van die liefde van God het inklusiviste geglo dat God enigiets moontlik sal doen om mense na Hom toe te trek. Terwyl hulle nog vashou aan die uniekheid van Christus, sien inklusiviste nogtans ‘n universele uitwerking van Christus se verlossing, selfs aan daardie mense sonder die epitemologiese bewustheid van Jesus se versoeningswerk. Dit mond uit in groter waardering vir die verlossingsresultate van die algemene openbaring en nie-Christelike godsdienste, wat uitloop in ‘n “breër hoop”, dat ‘n groter deel van die mensdom gered sal word as wat verwag word in die “minheid leerstuk” van die eksklusivisme.

Na ‘n aanbieding van die hoof-standpunte van die inklusivisme, volg die laaste afdeling van hierdie studie, wat aan ‘n evangelikalistiese evaluering toegewy is. Is dit ‘n aanvaarbare alternatief vir die tradisionele eksklusivisme van Amerikaanse evangelikale teologie? ‘n Sistematiese evaluering van die hoof-standpunte van inklusivisme word aangebied, deur die volgende studielede te vergelyk: Bibliologie, Pneumatologie, Christologie, en Hamartiologie (leer oor die sonde), met ‘n laaste beskouing oor die soteriologiese en praktiese resultate en effekte op evangelikale wêreldsending. Die hoof vertrekpunt word gevind rondom die

‘oordeel van God’ en hoe ‘n “hermeneutiek van oordeel” nodig is as ‘n volledige teenwig vir die “hermeneutiek van hoop” in die inklusiwisme.

FOREWORD

American evangelicalism is a phenomenon of grand proportions. Its influence is felt not only in the United States itself, but in virtually every corner of the globe. Current missiological statistics, for example, show that over half of all missionaries in the world come from the United States, and a very large portion of these from evangelical churches and mission agencies. Large sums of American money go to all areas of the world feeding Christian enterprises that are largely funded by American evangelicals.

Evangelical colleges and universities abound from the east coast to the west. In fact, there are more evangelical tertiary institutions of learning in America than all the universities of Europe combined, so large is the evangelical machinery of the United States. When evangelical publishing houses, companies and corporations are included, the influence of evangelicalism in America can hardly be ignored.

The past five American presidents all claimed to be evangelicals in varying degrees, or looked to woo the evangelical community, and with good reason. Some estimates put the number of evangelical Christians in the United States close to one hundred million, or nearly one-third of the population, and although such statistics are difficult to pin down, lower estimates place the figure closer to the fifty million range, still a large figure. Regardless of the exact number, such a block of people wields tremendous influence, not only in the religious sphere, but the political as well.

It is not remiss to say that any study of Christianity in America over the past century which does not take into consideration evangelicalism, could rightly be said to be an incomplete study. Even major secular magazines such as Time and Newsweek recognise this fact, and annually devote several issues to Christian themes. Over the past several years, Time Magazine has had annual articles covering “The Twenty-Five Most Influential Evangelicals” and the like.

And yet, evangelicalism is in a crisis. A recent New York Times article covering several pages considered the fragmentation that the evangelical movement has begun to experience, both in the religious as well as political realm. Although this may be news to secularists who politically follow evangelicalism, this is hardly news when it comes to the religious sphere of

the movement. For the past two decades if not longer, major theological rifts have occurred in American evangelicalism.

This dissertation will cover one of the hotter issues, that concerning the fate of the unevangelised. This debate has far reaching effects, especially in the area of world missions, and some have considered it *the* theological issue which will eventually reshape evangelicalism. American evangelicalism is presently experiencing a paradigm shift in its Soteriology, one which may radically change the traditionally negative view evangelicalism has had of non-Christian religions, thus reshaping important practical areas such as evangelism, missions, and apologetics.

As far reaching as these American developments may have on the rest of the world, the aim of this dissertation is not to dissect and digest the various views of God's judgment and salvation outside of North America. I am an American who has lived in Namibia for the past thirteen years. It is natural that I would pursue a doctorate from a South African institution, even though I realise that the views I hold are not altogether embraced by its faculty. It is also natural that I would pursue a doctorate which involves an important issue in my homeland.

It should be clear from the outset, then, that this dissertation is specifically addressing the American movement. Despite the temptation, statements made herein should not be taken out of their American context. The bibliography, for example, makes it clear that this study is concentrating on North American authors, not those from elsewhere. So, for example, despite the fact that in Europe the issue of the judgment of God has experienced a sort of renaissance, that has not been the case in North America. It took seven years before Marius Reiser's German work on God's judgment was translated into English (*Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), and despite the fact that the judgment of God was the theme of the 2007 Annual Meeting of the German Society for Evangelical Theology (Gesellschaft für Evangelische Theologie), I doubt that it will become the major theme of the Evangelical Theological Society of North America any time soon. Baird's call over forty years ago for more coverage of this topic appears to have fallen on deaf ears in North America. It has been a topic all-too-often ignored in American evangelicalism, one which needs decidedly more press.

I have deliberately concentrated on American evangelicalism in this dissertation and have not attempted to address the wider, global evangelical community. Despite the fact that a comprehensive doctoral study on the judgment of God has been done on the European continent by Gregor Etzelmüller, for example (*Zu Richten die Lebendigen und die Toten*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007), such work, while important, is not yet influential in American evangelical circles, nor is it or other non-American work regularly cited or used in this dissertation.

I am appreciative of the freedom I have been given by the University of Stellenbosch to evaluate this important issue in my home country's Christian landscape. I understand that many of the conclusions that I make in this dissertation may not correspond with views strongly held at the University itself, and I am deeply grateful for the liberty the faculty of theology has given me in formulating my ideas, not from a South African point-of-view, but from one decidedly American in perspective. I trust that the quality of my work will be acceptable even to those who vehemently disagree with my analysis and conclusion. I am certain that some of the things I say, coming from my American evangelical tradition, may sound strange to some readers of this dissertation not accustomed to that tradition. Yet, I am grateful for the academic freedom afforded me by the University of Stellenbosch to pursue my studies in this important area for American evangelicalism.

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“The Judgment of God and the Rise of ‘Inclusivism’ in Contemporary American Evangelicalism.”

Chapter 1

Introduction

“Judgment is the obverse of salvation, and its necessary precondition.”¹

Marius Reiser

Back in the early 1990s, I served as the Missions Intern of my church in the States. My church was (and still is) an multi-denominational, evangelical church situated in the suburbs of Chicago with about 2000 members. At that time the church had over 100 “missionary units”² serving on every continent of the globe except for Antarctica. Today, over a decade later, the church has even more missionaries. One of my tasks as the intern was to read through all the missionary correspondence and glean prayer points for various church publications. One story reported by missionaries in Zaire touched me deeply and its image is planted firmly in my mind even to this day.

The story was of a woman refugee fleeing a conflict in her homeland of Rwanda. Many fled to neighbouring countries including what was then known as Zaire (today the Democratic Republic of Congo). The woman was forced to flee her homeland with tens of thousands of other refugees, walking hundreds of kilometres to Zaire. Many died along the way, either by starvation or lack of drinkable water. This particular woman had with her an infant that she fed at her breast, but as the woman herself became more and more dehydrated, her breasts could no longer produce milk for her baby. This Rwandan woman, fleeing from war and bloodshed in the ethnic conflicts of her country, was now forced to watch her baby die in her arms. The helplessness the woman must have felt is unimaginable. The individual and mostly unknown atrocities caused by the evil of greedy, power-hungry people are also unimaginable. There is no doubt in my mind that if that woman could have given her life for her child she would have, but she could not.

The image in my mind is of a trail of people, walking along a dusty road, weak and malnourished, and this woman in particular holding her baby close to her breast. The baby is itself weak and thin, nursing but not finding any milk. The desperate woman can do nothing

¹ *Jesus and Judgment: The Eschatological Proclamation in Its Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 316.

² A “missionary unit” is either a single missionary, a couple without children, or a missionary family. Therefore, 100 missionary units involves easily over 150 adults and, including children, close to 300 people.

but continue walking, hoping to find some food or water. The missionary who reported the story noted that several days after the infant died, the woman still carried the child with her.

No further report was ever given, but one could hazard a fair guess that the woman died on that trail as well. The question that haunted me then – as it still does now – is, “Where is God in all of this?” Similar stories can be multiplied *ad infinitum* from all around the world, people in their misery and pathetic state of existence, who have had lives filled with turmoil and distress. Many were born in poverty and sickness and have only known an existence filled with pain and grief. Years have been spent fleeing from war or fighting diseases, watching their loved ones dying, entirely unable to do anything about it. Then these same people who have only known anguish during their years on this planet die – and spend an eternity in hell suffering even more anguish – because they never heard the message of Jesus and the salvation he brings. Where is God in all of this?

Honest Christians must admit that they have struggled with these same issues at some point in their lives. Certainly, there are some Christians who could not care less, or who even revel in the fact that people who die apart from knowing Jesus spend an eternity in hell, and that is that. But I hope that those types of Christians are few and far between. Clearly, some theologians believe that “fundamentalist” or “evangelical” camps are littered with such cold-hearted Christians, but I beg to differ with this all-too-easy-to-make caricature of traditional, evangelical beliefs. Many Christians, and not just from the liberal or mainline churches, but from evangelical and fundamentalist churches as well, struggle with these issues. The volume of work produced during the last two decades alone shows that this issue is a hot one in American evangelical circles as well as in other Christian traditions.

If I were to ask the question, “Where will that Rwandan woman be in the final consummation of all things?” I can expect to get a plethora of responses. Some will say that she is in heaven because all people go to heaven. Others will say that she has spent a brief time in hell or purgatory to perfect or educate her so that she may then enter heaven. Still others will say that she died not professing Jesus as her personal Lord and Saviour and so is currently in hell, where she will spend an eternity “paying for” her sins. And this does not exhaust the options or answers that are given for just such a question.³

At the heart of the question lies the heart of God. Does God love this woman? Does he really care what happens to her? And where do the ministries of Jesus Christ and the Holy

³ Obviously, there are atheistic or secular answers to this question as well, namely, that there is no afterlife and all people simply die as part of the evolutionary process. However, this study intends to deal with the various Christian answers to this question and will not address atheism and its claims.

Spirit fit in? Even though this is a soteriological issue, other doctrines quickly come to the fore. Who God is (Theology-proper), what Jesus has done on the cross (Christology), and what the Holy Spirit is doing now in the world (Pneumatology), will all play a part in answering these difficult questions. Even a question like, “Is this woman really a sinner before God?” (Hamartiology) must also be addressed.

However, all of these questions must be answered with the full weight of biblical data behind them. A tension often exists between the traditional evangelical, Protestant approach of Scripture as the norm, and those approaches which place more emphasis on natural or cultural sensibilities. Evangelicals normally maintain that they cannot pick and choose what portions of Scripture suit their answers, and then ignore the rest. This is particularly true when it comes to the judgment passages of Scripture. Far too often the tendency is to ignore these portions, especially when they come from the mouth of Jesus. But if evangelicals are to give good and truthful answers to the very difficult questions above, they must remain true to the Word of God in its entirety.

Much has been made of our pluralistic world.⁴ We no longer live in isolated units, insulated from others coming from far different cultural and religious upbringings. This mixture of peoples and ideas has brought the particularly Western and historically Christian nations of Europe and North America into a sort of crisis of faith. Christianity no longer holds sway as it once did. Christian ideals and principles are frequently if not consistently called into question, and the supremacy Christianity once enjoyed in determining the ethical and moral character of these nations is no longer present.

Many Christian theologians and scholars, feeling this pressure, have succumbed to it and in so doing have abandoned traditional teachings of the faith in the name of “tolerance” and “dialogue.” “Within today’s global horizon every religion and worldview has as much right to answer the basic questions of human existence as any other.”⁵ In fact, a pluralistic worldview is seen by some as the potential “saviour” of the human race because it fosters dialogue between the various cultures and religions more than any other worldview.⁶

⁴ Pluralism defined: “A situation in which various religious, philosophical or ideological conceptions live side by side and in which none of them holds a privileged status.” W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft, *Pluralism – Temptation or Opportunity?* (The Ecumenical Review 18, April 1996) 129-149.

⁵ David J. Krieger, *The New Universalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), back cover.

⁶ See *The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes (eds.), (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997). Knitter argues that without a pluralistic mindset, world problems such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, war, and the potential for nuclear disaster will not be averted (6).

There are four main categories of answers when addressing the problem of the Rwandan woman and related issues: universalism, pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism.⁷ These and a few other terms will have to be defined shortly.

Most would agree that exclusivism has maintained the prominent position for most of the Church's history, but that position is quickly fading. Today, within Christian circles, inclusivism is gaining ground fast, and outside Christianity, pluralism seems to hold the prominent position. This dissertation will concentrate on inclusivism, particularly as it relates to American evangelicalism, but this cannot be done without at least some interaction with the competing views of both pluralism and universalism.

This dissertation will address the matter of God's judgment, a teaching that is prominent in most exclusivistic systems, but becomes increasingly deficient the further along the continuum from inclusivism to universalism, where in some instances the judgment of God plays virtually no role at all.

1.1 Definition of Key Terms

Four competing views vie for the answer to the ultimate fate of humanity: universalism, pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism. Working definitions of the four views are as follows.

With “**universalism**” is meant that view whereby all humans are “saved” or attain “heaven” or however one may define an afterlife of eternal bliss. Obviously, various religions define this state differently, such as nirvana (Buddhism) or ultimate oneness with Brahman (Hinduism), but this dissertation will cover the particularly Christian view of such eternal existence.

There are two basic types of universalists. The first type are those who do not adhere to any Christian dogma and yet believe that Christians are “saved” because, ultimately, all people are saved anyway. The second type are specifically Christian universalists. The latter adhere to some or most of the basic tenets of the Christian faith and also firmly believe that all people will ultimately be saved. This dissertation is addressing more this latter type than the

⁷ Alan Race's book, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), made the pluralist, inclusivist, and exclusivist categories the standard terminology for this discussion. Much debate has subsequently ensued over the adequacy of these terms. For example, Terrance Tiessen argues in *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004) for five categories because he believes there is more nuance needed in addressing the various options. This matter will be covered later in the Introduction, but this dissertation will take Race's three categories as normative, if for no other reason than because most books on the topic have used them.

former.⁸ For some Christians, an “ultra-universalism”⁹ is operative whereby all people attain salvation, no matter what their beliefs, in light of the atoning work of Christ for all people. General or more commonplace universalism normally has with it some teaching concerning a temporary hell or purgatory whereby people do spend a time in punishment for their sins before attaining eternal life with God. Universalism is a shared view by many faiths, not simply the Christian one, and is particularly supported in the Eastern religions where reincarnation ultimately ensures the salvation of every individual.

With “**pluralism**”¹⁰ is meant the view whereby all religions are equal and equally beneficial or salvific for their adherents. There are several ways to attain salvation, not simply through any one mediator such as Jesus or Mohammed. God has chosen to reveal himself through all the major religions of the world: to the Europeans mainly through Jesus Christ, to the Arab world through Mohammed, to the Asian world through Buddha, and so on. Each of these “manifestations” of the will of God are equally valid and equally salvific. As with universalism, this pluralistic view is by no means simply limited to Christians, although this dissertation will concentrate on the Christian interpretations of this position.¹¹

With “**inclusivism**”¹² is mean the view whereby all religions have some beneficial components that bring their adherents into fellowship with God, yet Jesus Christ remains the only mediator. This inclusivism recognises that religions have some good and some bad elements, rather than considering all religions other than Christianity to be devoid of any merit or value in causing their adherents to be approved by God, as does the exclusivist’s point of view. The good elements of the world’s religions help to prepare a person for acceptance of Christ. This view relies heavily on a positive portrayal of natural theology and general revelation. Inclusivism is a Christian position because ultimately Jesus Christ remains

⁸ The Church Father Origen would be in this second category, whereas most reincarnationists would be in the first category. Origen did teach a sort of reincarnation doctrine but was decidedly Christian in his theology. It seems that a growing number of Christians are willing to incorporate reincarnation into their Christianity, even though reincarnation has traditionally been antithetical to the Christian message. However, Christian universalists, by in large, do not need to appeal to reincarnation for their soteriological views.

⁹ This term comes from Ernest Cassara, *Universalism in America: A Documentary History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

¹⁰ The word “pluralism” is consistently used in the world today, covering such matters as political pluralism, educational pluralism, and a hoard of other topics. The usage of the term in this dissertation specifically relates to religious pluralism.

¹¹ The main pluralist covered in this study is the British scholar John Hick, but others may be noted as well. Hick is a British scholar, but he makes it clear that his time spent in America, teaching at Cornell and Princeton, greatly formed his movement from evangelicalism to pluralism (Okholm, Dennis L. and Timothy R. Phillips (eds.), *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995] 32).

¹² Both the pluralist and inclusivist views have also been labelled “near universalism” by some scholars because they support a Soteriology that posits the salvation of the vast majority of humanity.

the mediator between God and humankind, albeit the other religions still have value in preparing people or pointing them to Christ.

The recent rise of inclusivism in American evangelicalism is the focus of this study. The main inclusivists covered in this dissertation are the Canadian professor and author, Clark Pinnock, and American professor John Sanders, but many others will be noted as well.

With “**exclusivism**”¹³ is meant the traditional Christian view that proclaims Jesus Christ as the sole mediator between God and humanity. There is no other way for the salvation of humankind than through the vicarious, atoning work of Christ. All other religions are merely human-made, idolatrous works of sinners in their futile attempt to cause themselves to be approved by God, or to raise themselves to the status of a god. This exclusivism generally involves acknowledgment of one’s sins, repentance, and a personal knowledge of the atoning work of Jesus on the cross with a placing of one’s faith and trust in that work, a typically Protestant emphasis.¹⁴ This exclusivism has been the dominant view of the church for nearly two thousand years and has only come under severe attack from Christian scholars in the last several decades.¹⁵

It should be noted that instead of using the terms exclusivism and restrictivism interchangeably, some see a distinction between the two. John Sanders proposes that exclusivism is somewhat broader than restrictivism. For the latter, “it is necessary to know about the work of Christ and exercise faith in Jesus before one dies if one is to be saved.” For the former, some universalists and “post-mortemists” fall under the exclusivist umbrella, which says that salvation is only through Christ but may not mean that a person must profess

¹³ Some do not like the word “exclusivism” as it sounds too negative. They have opted for words like “restrictivism” or “particularism.” However, there appears to be little difference between “excluding” and “restricting” in terms of their negative connotations. Particularism sounds appealing, but is little used and may involve greater confusion since it is used in various other theological debates which have little to do with the present discussion. For this dissertation, exclusivism will be used despite the objections of some to its use.

¹⁴ Various types of exclusivism can be delineated, such that the answer to the question, “What happens to those who have never heard about Jesus?” could be answered in several different ways, yet still within the exclusivist camp. Further, a Catholic form of exclusivism could be distinguished from a Protestant one. Such distinctions will be noted later in this study as the need arises.

¹⁵ Certainly, there have been some opponents to exclusivism throughout the centuries, but they have been relatively minor and small in number. Only in the last several decades, particularly since Vatican II, have there been so many opponents of this traditional view that one wonders if, in time, the exclusivist’s position will become the minority view. Pinnock claims the inclusivist view is already the majority view in ecumenical churches (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 108), while Daniel Clendenin sees exclusivism as the “minority position” among scholars of religion (*Many Gods, Many Lords* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995] 73), and pluralism as the “ascendant view among mainstream Western scholars of religion” (90). Pinnock also refers to inclusivism as the view of the “silent majority of Arminian evangelicals” (*The Grace of God and the Will of Man* [Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995] 27).

personal faith in Jesus in this lifetime in order to be saved.¹⁶ Although Sanders' distinction is interesting, the three categories (pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism) have been the standard form used, and to try to introduce new terms now after nearly two and a half decades of using those categories would only result in confusion.¹⁷ For this study, "exclusivism" will be used in its broader and more recognised connotation and "restrictivism" seen as a synonym.

The topic of Open Theism (also known as Free Will Theism)¹⁸ will necessarily impinge upon this discussion of inclusivism. The basic goals which formed the inclusivist's hope of a wider salvation have come together to form a more complex system of the nature and character of God which make this wider hope possible, known as Open Theism.¹⁹ It would not be inaccurate to say that most open theists are inclusivists, and vice versa.²⁰ Therefore, at times the two terms will be used interchangeably. However, to avoid confusion, a very brief summary of Open Theism is provided here.²¹

Open Theism, in a desire to make God's plan of salvation wider than traditionally envisioned by evangelicalism, does so by calling into question such tenets of classical theism as the immutability of God and his exhaustive omniscience, especially as the latter relates to God's ability to know the future choices of free-willed beings. God so much respects the freedom to choose which he has given humans that he limits himself so as to not violate it. This he does out of supreme love for his creatures. Open theists also tend to have a more positive view of non-Christian religions, seeing them as an integral part of human culture which God can use to woo individuals to himself, often combined with prevenient grace and

¹⁶ John Sanders (ed.), *What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views of the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995) 12-13. To label some universalists as "exclusivists" seems particularly confusing.

¹⁷ For starters, virtually every source used for this study, except for the more recent ones by Sanders, do not make this distinction.

¹⁸ Geisler refers to it as "neotheism" in *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New "Open" View of God – Neotheism's Dangerous Drift* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997), but "Open Theism" is by far the most common designation, despite the reasons Geisler provides for why he prefers his own term of neotheism (73-74).

¹⁹ This Okholm and Phillips refer to as a "massive theological shift – a paradigm change – in modern theology" (*Four Views*, 24).

²⁰ However, many open theists could logically be pluralists as well, but as there are virtually no evangelicals who would consider themselves pluralists, this conclusion concerning the relationship between inclusivism and Open Theism is a safe one to make.

²¹ At times, it will be preferable to use the term inclusivism when specifically discussing soteriological issues, and for this study, inclusivism will be recognised as the soteriological arm of Open Theism. Therefore, when discussing the broader theological topics (such as God's omniscience or the freewill of humans), "Open Theism" will be the term of choice. The main evangelicals used in this study of inclusivism (Pinnock, Sanders, et al) are all open theists as well.

general revelation. In these ways, then, open theists tend to be strongly opposed to Calvinism while maintaining a claim to evangelicalism.²²

The term “evangelical” should be defined, as it appears in the title and often in this dissertation. North American, evangelical Christianity does not embody any one denomination but is cross-denominational in nature. Believers in certain Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Presbyterian, Independent, and Pentecostal churches, as well as a host of other denominations, can fall under this broad category.²³ Despite their denominational differences, they all adhere to what are traditionally “evangelical” tenets of the faith: the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the belief in the inerrancy and authority of the Word of God, belief that salvation is by faith and not by works, and a belief in the vicarious atonement of Jesus, his deity, and his literal, physical resurrection from the dead.²⁴ As can be seen, the terms “evangelical,” “conservative,” and “exclusivist” have great similarities.²⁵ This study comes particularly from an evangelical/exclusivist point of view.²⁶

Some may equate this evangelicalism with “fundamentalism,” but such an equation is faulty and ignores the historical differences between the two groups as they have developed in

²² They relate themselves more to the tradition of Eastern Orthodoxy, Wesleyanism and Arminianism, per John Sanders, et al, “Truth at Risk,” *Christianity Today* (April 23, 2001) 103.

²³ Some might even be able to claim that there are Catholic and Orthodox evangelicals as well.

²⁴ In his short book, *Evangelicals in America; Who They Are, What They Believe* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), professor of philosophy at Reformed Seminary in Orlando, Ronald Nash, gives a good summary of how the term should best be understood. In chapter 3 he notes “Evangelical Roots” and then provides “ten basic beliefs” which include the Trinity, deity of Christ, Incarnation, Atonement and Resurrection. In chapter 8 he discusses “Evangelical Pressure Points” and notes the “conflicting evangelical views about the Bible” (97). Although a general discussion, it is helpful when using the term. His working definition: “One can normally expect that anyone who claims to be an evangelical is a Christian believer whose theology is traditional or orthodox, who takes the Bible as his or her ultimate authority in matters of faith and practice, who has had a religious conversion (is born again), and who is interested in leading others to the same kind of conversion experience” (15). The one drawback may be that his book is now twenty-years old and much has happened on the evangelical landscape since that time. For a more recent, yet similar, understanding of the term “evangelical” on the American scene, consult The Barna Group, a research think-tank that surveys religious opinions in American evangelicalism (www.barna.org). See note 25 below for further discussion.

²⁵ Obviously, not all evangelicals are exclusivists. If a clear distinction needs to be made between the two terms at some point in this study, such a distinction will be provided.

²⁶ A battle is brewing, particularly in North America, over the term “evangelical” and what it can and cannot mean. Many evangelical theologians are positing doctrines which have characteristically not been considered evangelical, particularly in the Open Theism debate. There is great power in evangelical institutions, especially in America, and co-opting such a term would be a major victory for more liberal-minded theologians. These revisionist evangelicals are here to stay, and in time some more conservative evangelicals may begin to distance themselves from the term, especially if more and more liberal doctrines are espoused by the revisionists. See “A New Low?” *World Magazine* (April 6, 2002) 26. Also see Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993) to see how the term’s definition has been changing (esp. 21-35). Erickson goes so far as to call our time “post-conservative evangelicalism” in *The Evangelical Left* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997) 16-28, where he provides good detail for this shift from traditional evangelicalism. John Armstrong asks if, given the current movement of evangelical theology more toward liberalism, “Will the term *evangelical* even have significance?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996) 18, emphasis original. Michael Horton later comments in the same book that evangelicalism is a theology in disarray and the “imprecision is expanding” (258).

America. Fundamentalists generally-speaking believe that people only in their specific church or denomination will be saved, whereas evangelicals are more “inter-denominational” in flavour. Further, fundamentalists have been rightly criticised for pulling away from society and living with a “holy huddle” mentality. Such is rarely the case with evangelicals.

Terms such as “heaven” and “hell” and “God” and other decidedly Christian terms will be used throughout this study just to simplify matters. As world religions are discussed, many other terms are used to designate what ultimately is the same thing in some form or another. If the need to specify nirvana as opposed to heaven exists, for example, it will be done. Otherwise, the Christian terms will be used for discussion purposes.

During the Reformation and for a fair time afterward, the underlying assumption in theological debates between Protestant Christians was the authority and reliability of the Scriptures. That has entirely changed. In the past, evangelicals could simply begin their arguments by quoting Scripture. Now, however, those who believe in the sole or ultimate authority of God’s Word must spend considerable time first refuting the claims of those who do not hold such views. In other words, one must defend one’s Bibliology before espousing one’s theological viewpoints.²⁷

This present work, however, will not do so.²⁸ Because this dissertation deals with issues which impinge upon evangelicalism in America, arguments are normally within the evangelical camp itself, where biblical authority and reliability are givens. Suffice it for now to say that Scripture is viewed as totally reliable and trustworthy, being so because it has been communicated from God via divine inspiration through the Holy Spirit, who preserved fallible authors from making errors.²⁹ However, comments will be made on certain bibliological matters throughout this study as the need arises.³⁰

The last term of importance to define is “judgment.” The title of this dissertation, *The Judgment of God and the Rise of ‘Inclusivism’ in Contemporary American Evangelicalism*,

²⁷ It is noted that often some liberal scholars do not do this but just assume that all bibliological matters are closed and won in their favour.

²⁸ The Protestant canon of Scripture will be used as the basis upon which determinations concerning Christian thought and faith will be judged. This canon, which has been handed down to us and has formed the basis of authority for Christianity for many centuries, remains in such a position today. In other words, this dissertation does not intend to excise portions of this recognised canon, but to rather accept it as it has been handed down.

²⁹ The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) is a good foundational statement of the position taken by this dissertation. Most American evangelicals would affirm this statement and therefore there will be little disagreement with inclusivists over it. Pluralists would find the statement much more problematic.

³⁰ To be clear, the generally-accepted approach in theological circles today (ones which are not strictly evangelical) is to present bibliological reasons why the passages chosen to support one’s position are authentic. This is especially true whenever the Gospels and the sayings of Jesus are concerned. However, as this dissertation is strictly-speaking a Systematic Theology dissertation, a full-blown defence of authenticity, something much better placed in a New Testament dissertation, will not be attempted.

immediately limits the source data and area of study, but it does delineate what “judgment” is being considered. For example, when Jesus tells the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Mt. 18:23-34), that servant is punished for not showing mercy to his fellow servant. Is this a picture of the eternal punishment that awaits all those who are unforgiving, or is it a picture of a temporary or temporal punishment that the servant receives, until he sees the error of his ways and corrects them?

In some instances, God’s judgment is meant to reform the individual so that he or she can learn from mistakes made and not make them again. In technical language, this might be called “temporal judgment,” one in this life. Often this is designated as “discipline” from the Lord, and it can take several forms, such as loss of health, shame, loss of employment, punishment in human courts because of sin, even the gnawing unrest of a guilt-ridden conscience.

On the other hand, a future judgment in the afterlife could be discussed, and in this instance “eschatological judgment” is a good term to use. Coupled with the notion of purgatory or a finite hell, this eschatological judgment can also be reformatory and disciplinary in nature, although normally when speaking of eschatological judgment, one has the final judgment and fate of the individual in mind. In this present study, it will be using the term in that way, pointing to the final, ultimate judgment. “Temporal” judgment, then, will involve discipline or punishment in this life, while “eternal” or “eschatological” judgment will indicate the ultimate, last judgment that each individual is subject to.³¹

This present study will be looking more for eschatological judgment as it relates to the ultimate fate of those who have not heard of Jesus. Does inclusivism take seriously the biblical data in this regard? This “hermeneutic of judgment” will then be used in the systematic analysis of the inclusivist position when it comes to the fate of humanity.³²

1.2 The Need for a “Hermeneutic of Judgment”

The debate which has raged in American evangelical theology for the last two decades concerning the fate of those outside of the knowledge of Jesus Christ has been quite extensive. Our pluralistic world has brought more and more Christians in the West into contact with people of other faiths. Several Christian authors and theologians have become

³¹ Travis calls this “final, eternal, eschatological judgment” (Stephen J. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God: Divine Retribution in the New Testament* [London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1986]). See also Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, 6, for a brief definition of similar terms.

³² The term “hermeneutic of judgment” has been chosen to counterbalance the inclusivist term “hermeneutic of hopefulness” (eg., Pinnock, *Wideness*, 20).

increasingly popular in questioning the traditional orthodox understanding of salvation in Jesus Christ and him alone. These pluralist and inclusivist theologians have become highly influential and their views are becoming more and more acceptable to everyday Christians. But how acceptable are their proposals for conservative believers in American evangelicalism? Do they adequately address biblical teaching and the historic Christian faith, or are they merely catering to the modern mindset and popular theology of the day?

The specific discussion of God's judgment, particularly as it relates to the teaching of Jesus, has gotten very little press. The German theologian Marius Reiser notes this trend:

"Judgment is a topic that has been neglected, and even avoided, both by theological research and church preaching, for some time."

He further notes the "remarkable silence regarding Jesus' proclamation of judgment."³³

James Martin shows in his very thorough historical review of the topic, "the Last Judgment was rendered dangerously expendable" in Protestant theology.³⁴ As the title of his book suggests, Martin gives a survey of Protestant theology up to the time of Albrecht Ritschl with special concern for the Last Judgment. The Protestant emphasis on faith, coupled with the Catholic lack of assurance of salvation and fear of the Last Judgment, caused Protestant theology to emphasise the present benefits of salvation to the neglect of the negative, eschatological judgment. This moved ultimately to the point where believers undergo no judgment whatsoever, as is characterised for example by the non-eschatological theologies of Schleiermacher and Ritschl. He comments:

"Because the Last Judgment was not necessary for salvation, the way was left open for a rationalistic individualism which could speak of ethics and salvation and even justification without reference to the Judgment. In this way man became autonomous and ideas arose concerning his destiny which had no need of any revelation of the power and glory of God in man's future. Protestant theology became de-eschatologized and in this really lost contact with the message of the New Testament" (27).

In essence, then, "one of the most controversial and difficult themes of modern biblical scholarship" (vii) has all but been forgotten.

This has certainly been evident in the soteriological debates which have marked American evangelicalism in the last twenty years. Still, despite the paucity of discussion on the

³³ Marius Reiser, *Jesus and Judgment*, ix and 2.

³⁴ James P. Martin, *The Last Judgment in Protestant Theology from Orthodoxy to Ritschl* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963) 16.

judgment of God, and in the light of the plethora of material already produced in this pluralism/inclusivism/ exclusivism debate, the question could rightly be asked: Why is more material needed in this area?³⁵

The vast majority of work from the pluralist and inclusivist positions greatly emphasise the “God of Jesus” and his forgiveness, love, and grace. From this position, the non-Christian faiths are then viewed in a positive, even salvific light. However, this imbalanced view of the teaching and ministry of Jesus must be counterbalanced by all the biblical data that concerns Jesus and his teaching on the judgment and wrath of the Father. This is the topic of particular interest in this dissertation, an issue that has been virtually ignored by pluralist and inclusivist writers. In this study it is labelled a “hermeneutic of judgment.”

Although this soteriological issue has always existed in the Church, it has become a hot topic in the last twenty years in American evangelicalism and has influenced other systematic areas, such as Christology, Theology-proper, Bibliology, and so on.

Inclusivists make Pneumatology a key platform of their position and conclusions, something for which they should be commended. Clark Pinnock, for example, says that anything other than an inclusivist understanding of the gospel limits the power and work of the Holy Spirit. However, certain questions must be asked: Do the inclusivists appeal to a Pneumatology and a working of the Holy Spirit that is at odds with Scripture? Can scholars appeal to the freedom of the Holy Spirit to move wherever he chooses to move and do whatever he decides to do, all the while contradicting the very Scripture most inclusivists claim the Holy Spirit produced through inspiration? Where does the judgment via God’s Spirit come into play in their position? Should evangelicals expect the Spirit of God to accept any and all religious expressions, or to judge those which are at odds with God’s nature and revelation?

A bibliological consideration is how inclusivists use God’s Word to support their position. Is their approach truly in line with traditional evangelical approaches? This is a question not only for Bibliology itself, but for their Christology as well. Their approach to the person and work of Jesus - here accepting his words, there ignoring them - logically yields a negligence of the “words and acts of judgment” by Jesus. Jesus often speaks of punishment, he

³⁵ The November 2002 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, held in Toronto, Canada, had as its theme, “Christianity and Other Religions.” The June 2002 edition of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* had several articles on Open Theism, and the November 2003 meeting (which I personally attended) actually had a member-wide vote concerning two Open Theism proponents (Clark Pinnock and John Sanders), their view of Scripture, and whether their membership should be allowed to continue in the Society. The vote was 32.9% in favour of removing Pinnock and 62.7% in favour of removing Sanders, neither reaching the 67% required for removal. This matter remains a hot topic, despite (or maybe, because of) the vast amount of literature already produced concerning these matters.

frequently speaks of hell and torment and judgment, but the pluralists and inclusivists deal little if at all with these words.

This necessarily affects their Christology as it relates to the picture of the character and nature of Jesus. Are inclusivists creating a Jesus in the image of a tolerance-loving Western worldview and unwittingly creating a bifurcation between the Old and New Testaments? By ignoring a “hermeneutic of judgment” in their approach to the biblical Jesus are the inclusivists creating a new Jesus to fit the times? One must then question how this recreated Jesus can adequately reveal God and his character.

One’s Theology-proper is also affected by this issue. Can “God is love” be used to negate all teachings concerning the wrath and judgment of God, especially those which come from the lips of Jesus? Inclusivists make a noble attempt at reconciling what has been an historically thorny Christian dilemma in their discussions concerning the attributes of God and how to properly balance them (eg., love and justice, mercy and wrath), but have they gone too far in granting greater weight to those attributes which necessarily support their inclusivist conclusions?

As already noted, many evangelical inclusivists are espousing Open Theism. This stands to reason, since the God of the inclusivist must necessarily be distanced from the classical view of God, which more readily supports the exclusivist position. Therefore, evangelical inclusivists such as Pinnock and Sanders are finding themselves more and more comfortable with a view of God which looks less and less like the traditional, evangelical portrait of the Creator. This affects Theology-proper and the attributes of God such as immutability, omniscience, love, and wrath.

Soteriologically related to the last point, if God is not portrayed as a God of wrath and judgment, but rather of only love and forgiveness, then the notion that this God will eternally judge sinners seems to be eliminated. This leads many inclusivist theologians (and even some exclusivist ones) to conclusions such as post-mortem evangelism, “middle knowledge,” and annihilationist positions. The “all religions are basically valid” point-of-view logically leads to “all religious people will be saved.”

A “hermeneutic of judgment” is necessary to counterbalance the current love-affair many Christian scholars have with a picture of Jesus and his Father which is solely loving, tolerant, and appeasing. The vast amount of material from the teachings of Jesus concerning the

judgment of God must be taken into account before soteriological conclusions can be made, especially conclusions as they relate to other religions and their adherents.³⁶

1.3 Are All Inclusivists Alike?

Although there is great unanimity among American inclusivists when it comes to the major tenets of their beliefs, there are nonetheless some slight differences which will be noted here. Terrance Tiessen argues in *Who Can Be Saved?* for five categories of consideration, not the three of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Two of his categories fall under the more general “exclusivism” umbrella (Ecclesiocentrism and Agnosticism), and two under “inclusivism” (Accessibilism and Religious Instrumentalism). The last one is the traditional pluralism view (Relativism). What makes Tiessen’s work all the more interesting is that he is one of the rare Calvinist scholars who has opted for an inclusivist position, the Accessibilism variety. His distinction between two types of inclusivism introduces the first delineation in the inclusivism camp, that between Protestant and Catholic inclusivism.

The first difference within inclusivism involves the role non-Christian religions play. Perhaps the most famous inclusivist, the German Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, brought openness to non-Christian religions to the foreground, not only in Catholicism, but within Protestant circles as well.³⁷ His popular term “anonymous Christian” made it clear that non-Christian religions can be salvific, and Rahner developed an understanding of other faiths as open to salvation.

“We must therefore rid ourselves of the prejudice that we can face a non-Christian religion with the dilemma that it must either come from God in everything it contains and thus correspond to God’s will and positive providence, or be simply a purely human construction” (vol. 5:127).

Once this prejudice is eliminated, “there could be no question of a serious and also actually effective salvific design of God for all men, in all ages and places” (128).

³⁶ One interesting question not asked by this study involves Ecclesiology. Is there any relationship between inclusivism and the growing tendency in American churches to avoid church discipline? Can a link be made between a tolerance-loving culture that rarely if ever judges the beliefs or actions of others, and pluralist and inclusivist positions which seemingly minimise any real judgment of false religions and false beliefs? Can it be shown that with the relativism that is a necessary byproduct of the pluralist position (and to a lesser extent the inclusivist one) comes a church that no longer disciplines its members, and no longer demands holiness from them?

³⁷ Rahner’s works are summarised in the compilation *Theological Investigations* (London: DLT, 1966), which extends to over twenty volumes. Chapter 6 of volume 5 provides the foundation for his views of Christianity and the non-Christian religions.

However, this positive view of non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation is not accepted by all inclusivists. Canadian author, speaker and professor of theology at McMaster Divinity College, Clark Pinnock, is perhaps the most prominent of the North American inclusivists, and he does not accept it.³⁸ He advocates a “cautious inclusivism” which “stops short of saying that the religions themselves as such are vehicles of salvation” (99).³⁹ He also notes the difficulty Rahner’s term “anonymous Christian” has received from both Christian and non-Christian camps, often the latter finding it offensive (120).⁴⁰

The second difference within inclusivism concerns the fate of those who have not heard and what evangelicals should believe about it today. Should evangelicals maintain a pessimistic or optimistic view of their destiny? Alister McGrath is an exclusivist who writes in the position of an optimistic view of their destiny in the book *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World*. Interestingly, although not in the position of an inclusivist in this book, McGrath nonetheless appears much like one according to the editors (24), Pinnock who portrays the classic inclusivist position (187, 190), and the authors who portray the exclusivist position (197). In his brief response to Pinnock’s article, McGrath has virtually nothing bad to say about it (129-132). This at least serves as an example of the spectrum that exists between inclusivism and exclusivism.

The third difference concerns the actual state of the afterlife. Faced with the dilemma of what to believe concerning the fate of those who have never heard the gospel, many evangelicals have adopted alternative views of hell. Some, like Andover Newton Theological School professor Gabriel Fackre and evangelical writer Donald Bloesch, posit “post-mortem evangelism” (also known as “eschatological evangelization”), where people still have the opportunity to hear the gospel and make a choice even after they die.⁴¹ Others, like Pinnock, have changed their position on this issue, something that will be addressed later. Pinnock formerly had advocated post-mortem evangelism but has now come to maintain annihilationism, where all people who die apart from Christ simply cease to exist.

³⁸ Okholm and Phillips, *Four Views*, 24, 99, 199. “Religions as such do not mediate salvation” (116).

³⁹ Despite Pinnock’s comments opposing Rahner’s positive view of other religions, to many exclusivists the difference is only academic and semantic. To them there appears to be no difference between “non-Christian religions are salvific” and “God is working through the positive elements of non-Christian religions in order to save those adherents.” See one exclusivist’s objections in Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994) 112-115.

⁴⁰ John Hick calls Rahner’s term “an offensive Christian paternalism” (cited in Nash, *Only Savior?* 111).

⁴¹ John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 189, 197-200.

Annihilationism and post-mortem evangelism are the two main options for inclusivists who do not believe that unevangelised people automatically go to hell.⁴²

These differences suggest that inclusivism is by no means monolithic. However, for all the issues that will be addressed in this study, especially as they relate to the judgment of God, it will be difficult to find any inclusivists who do not fall within the distinctions that will be utilised in evaluating the inclusivist position.

1.4 Conclusion

Americans live in a pluralistic society, where exclusive beliefs held in the religious realm are considered intolerable. Good, honest questions are being asked of the traditional exclusivism which has been at the centre of American evangelicalism for generations, an exclusivism which has generally been very negative about the fate of those who have never heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

These very real concerns have bred in American evangelicalism an openness to other theologies less conservative and traditional, and more “modern” in their attempts at answering these questions. The current Open Theism debate is just such an example, as are the soteriological disputes which have raged for the last two decades over inclusivism and pluralism. This has resulted in a rise in inclusivism within evangelical circles. Some welcome this as a necessary and needed change; others view it as a bane.

Attention can now be turned to the teachings of the inclusivists which impinge upon an understanding of the judgment of God, by first analysing the key tenets of inclusivism. What makes evangelical inclusivism so radically different from traditional evangelicalism, and why has it caused such an uproar in American evangelicalism?

⁴² There is a third evangelical alternative to the view of eternal damnation for the unevangelised, and that is middle knowledge. However, as this involves God’s knowledge of potential future choices of humans, it is not advocated by proponents of Open Theism and hence the large majority of inclusivists. Obviously, some evangelicals take an agnostic position on the issue, claiming that Scripture does not provide enough evidence to make a definitive conclusion on the matter. This is Tiessen’s second category of Agnosticism, one of his two brands of exclusivism.

Chapter 2

The Theology of Inclusivism

In theology it is sometimes difficult to determine which came first, the chicken or the theological egg. With inclusivists such as Clark Pinnock or John Sanders, at times it may appear problematic to determine what is ultimately driving their theology. In Pinnock's case particularly, what must be determined is what has motivated his move from a typical evangelical system to one which is appearing less and less evangelical as the years pass.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of Clark Pinnock on twentieth-century North American evangelicalism. He is considered "perhaps the most significant evangelical theologian of the last half of the twentieth century" by Henry H. Knight III of the St. Paul School of Theology, and Stanley Grenz thinks similarly when he says, "No twentieth-century evangelical thinker has been more controversial than Clark Pinnock."⁴³

One way to determine what forms the heart of Pinnock's inclusivism is to look at the chronology of his theological life. Fortunately, Pinnock provides just such a chronology in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, a book in which he serves as general editor, and in the last section of the second edition of *The Scripture Principle*. Barry Callen also provides an intellectual biography of Pinnock in *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey Toward Renewal*. The reader may also look through the numerous writings of Pinnock both in book and journal media. For the past forty years he has been a prolific author, writing or editing dozens of books and articles. These provide a good overview of what have been the major forces driving his theological journey, one which has changed dramatically over the years, producing a "tension between openness and evangelical commitment."⁴⁴

In the first chapter of *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," Pinnock recounts how he has steadily moved over the past four decades from a theology that was decidedly Calvinistic to one which appears to have abandoned every important tenet of that system and in the estimation of some, borders on liberalism.

By his own characterisation, Pinnock speaks of the dominance Calvinism enjoys in North American evangelicalism, what he terms a "Calvinistic hegemony" in one section heading of his chapter (*Grace & Will*, 16; all subsequent quotations from the same source until otherwise

⁴³ Both quotations come from Barry L. Callen's *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey Toward Renewal* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 2000) back cover.

⁴⁴ Philip Meadows, of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, quoted on the back cover of Callen's *Journey*.

noted). All of his training introduced him to “theologically sound” Christian scholars who were almost all “staunchly Calvinistic” (17). Pinnock notes,

“Although there is a great and growing diversity theologically and otherwise in this [evangelical] coalition, the dominating theology is Reformed or Calvinian. Critics have not exaggerated much when they have wanted to call it ‘neo-Calvinism’” (17).

Pinnock even goes so far as to claim that Calvinist theologians “pretty well control the teaching of theology in the large evangelical seminaries; they own and operate the largest book-publishing houses; and in large part they manage the inerrancy movement. This means they are strong where it counts – in the area of intellectual leadership and property” (27).

Yet, despite all this influence, Pinnock can still speak of the “silent majority of Arminian evangelicals” (27). He sees that most laypeople are Arminian in inclination, that the “believing masses appear to take for granted a belief in human free will,” and “few have the stomach to tolerate Calvinian theology in its logical purity” (26). It is for these reasons that “the laity seem to gravitate happily to Arminians like C. S. Lewis for their intellectual understanding” (26-27).

Pinnock appears to find comfort in this fact, “so I do not think I stand alone” (27). In fact, he apparently sees himself as an individual willing to stand up against a vast, Calvinist machine, to speak for the “silent” people unable to speak for themselves, a most noble undertaking.

Although it would be difficult to test his theory concerning Calvinism’s dominance, the greater issue is found in Pinnock’s personal perceptions and reasons for moving away from Calvinism, than whether or not those perceptions are technically accurate. In fact, it may be for this reason that many evangelicals have perceived Pinnock moving toward liberalism in his movement away from Calvinist evangelicalism. From their perspective, perhaps a movement away from Calvinism signals a movement toward liberalism.

Whatever the case may be, Pinnock himself sees no such threat. He prefers to characterise his personal theological movement away from Calvinism and firmly into the Arminian camp, which can hardly be construed as a movement toward liberalism. He endeavours to show that his theology is just another of the many strands of theological perspectives which fit into the broad camp of evangelicalism.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Thus Steven Land can characterise Pinnock’s theology as “a confluence of Eastern, Wesleyan and Pentecostal streams” (Callen: *Journey*, back cover).

In the introduction to *Grace & Will*, Pinnock speaks of the broad spectrum which evangelical theology encompasses. He sees no problem in using the word “evangelical” to represent all these differences, as long as evangelicals do not forget that there are in fact differences.

“For some purposes it makes sense to call a wide variety of Christians “evangelical” to distinguish them from liberal reductionists, for example, but it can also be quite misleading to call them by this adjective if the umbrella term obscures important differences among them which should not be lost sight of” (ix).

It is exactly these types of “important differences” which this dissertation means to address, as was already noted in the Introduction. Classical, American evangelicalism has taught that Jesus is the only way for salvation, yet inclusivists such as Pinnock allow room for God to use non-Christian religions to draw individuals to himself. American evangelicalism has traditionally taught that God exhaustively knows the future, but today’s brand of inclusivist/open theist believes that God cannot know the future choices free-willed beings will make. Yet all of these Christians call themselves “evangelicals.” Thus this dissertation implicitly agrees with Pinnock when he says that such important differences should not be obscured.

In fact, Pinnock sees some good in these differences.

“Well-meaning, thoughtful Christians can and do differ in their judgments on these important matters. Therefore, we need to listen to one another, hold back the recriminations, and see what we can learn from one another” (16).

Because no theological system can possibly embody all the truth, a “myth that evangelicals often hold” (28), dialogue between these differing camps can only strengthen the overall movement broadly known as evangelicalism.

He also emphasises his desire to not “freeze theological development at some arbitrary point in past history” (28). In fact, as much as he wants to move away from Augustine’s brand of theology, he nonetheless sees in himself a similar trait, that of moulding Christian theology into the framework of one’s current cultural needs and likes. “If Augustine had the courage to deal with the culture of his day and come up with some dazzling new insights, then we can do the same in our own setting” (29).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ It appears rather odd that at the end of this chapter, Pinnock would characterise Augustine’s theology as “dazzling new insights,” when it was the very system from which he strongly wanted to move away. In fact,

Thus the characterisation of his own theological movement as a “pilgrimage.” Pinnock notes that such a pilgrimage is not only necessary, but is in fact unavoidable. Because “God relates to his human creatures in history” (16), theological change is to be expected. “One is almost certain to change one’s mind several times over a lifetime on mysteries as deep as these” (16). Thus, modern evangelicals should not become unnerved by the theology that Pinnock and his ilk are attempting to introduce into North American evangelicalism.

Such a pilgrimage has the ability to speak to the present culture in new ways, ways which the old systems often fail to do. Pinnock appears worried that previous systems have stagnated and can no longer speak to the modern generation. Thus his characterisation of a Calvinism which apparently dominates the Christian academia, yet has no appeal to the believing masses. A ‘pilgrimage’ expresses a movement into territory not previously explored, not a nostalgic glance to history gone by. “Like it or not, we are embarked on a pilgrimage in theology and cannot determine exactly where will it lead and how it will end” (28).

The present generation needs biblical truth freshly spoken. In fact, this is precisely what Pinnock has identified as the motivating factor in the need for change in theological thinking. Too many evangelicals in his estimation are looking at the past, as if Christian theology were cast in stone. But because God reveals himself in human history, evangelicals should expect a theology which changes with the times.

That is why Pinnock believes, for example, that few Christians today are willing to stand up for the theology of Calvin and Luther in all their “rigorous particulars” (26), because such theological systems are no longer culturally appealing. Christians are in need of a “fresh and faithful reading of the Bible in dialogue with modern culture, which places emphasis on autonomy, temporality, and historical change” (15). The following quotation perhaps best characterises Pinnock’s thinking in this regard:

“It is in fact an opportunity to be faithful to the Bible in new ways and to state the truth of the Christian message creatively for the modern generation” (28).

Thus modern evangelicals should take heart despite the “dizziness” (28) that is often felt when so many traditional truths are called into question. Pinnock and similar scholars are only moulding a Christian theology which is more relevant to modern individuals, and as such can be expected to impact modern culture in better ways than the stagnant, old systems.

Pinnock considers the “new insights” that Augustine brought into Christian theology as dismal and damaging, as will be seen shortly, much the same attitude that many evangelicals today have about Pinnock’s new insights.

Pinnock appears impatient with evangelicals who have no stomach for such a pilgrimage, or who find it unnerving or frightening.

“I have no comfort for those who, afraid of missing eternal truth, choose to identify it with some previous theological work and try to impose it unchanged on the present generation or desire to speak out of the past and not to come into contact with the modern situation” (28).

This is a harsh indictment of his detractors, who no doubt also intend to make Christian doctrine relevant to the modern situation. It is doubtful that there are evangelicals today who say to themselves, “Look, we don’t care if our theology is irrelevant, we are going to keep teaching it anyway.” Yet, Pinnock has a tendency to create straw-men of his detractors, and this impatience often characterises his writing.

Pinnock has a habit of taking backhanded slaps at those with whom he disagrees. For example, evangelicals who believe that modern Christians should not meddle with truths such as God’s omniscience or sovereignty are characterised as people who walk by sight and not by faith (28). Those who believe that the truth of Scripture written 2000 years ago still applies today are apparently “frightened to think God may have more light to break forth,” and those who still believe that Jesus is the only Saviour and that non-Christian religions are misleading Pinnock characterises as Pharisees.⁴⁷ At times he appears most gracious, at other times condescending toward those with whom he disagrees.

Despite this impatience, Pinnock’s overall desire is a noble one. He hopes to formulate a Christian theology which is more culturally aware and relevant than what he perceives in a Calvinism that is harsh and unwelcoming. Thus his pilgrimage.

However, before looking at the particulars of Pinnock’s pilgrimage, it must be clear from what specifically it was that he moved. Obviously, there are different varieties of “Calvinism” and so, to use the term too broadly may yield confusion. Pinnock makes it clear in virtually everything he writes that he is opposed to that type of Calvinism which actually finds its root in the teachings of Augustine and has been carried further by Calvin and his followers, what he terms “theological determinism.”⁴⁸

The title that Pinnock has chosen for his chapter about this theological pilgrimage immediately provides a strong insight into his theological drift. Pinnock makes no secret

⁴⁷ *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992) 41.

⁴⁸ It should also be noted that Pinnock characterises his own theological pilgrimage as a movement away from rationalistic modernism to post-modern thinking, eg., “Freedom from Rational Epistemology” in *The Scripture Principle*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006) 263, but this will be noted in greater detail when his doctrine of Scripture is examined.

about his growing dislike of Augustinian theology, especially as it was found in the teaching of Calvin. His characterisation of Augustinian theology is a theology which “denies the largeness of salvation, transforms the nature of election, and virtually denies the freedom of the will” (*Wideness*, 182; all subsequent quotations from the same source until otherwise noted). This provides some good insight into the reasons why Pinnock found himself moving away from Augustine’s thinking.⁴⁹

Of course, this movement away from one thing implies a movement toward something else. What Pinnock himself characterises as a “bold departure” (182) from the typical evangelical mode of thinking, has shown a preference, in his opinion, for church fathers and scholars which are not so widely respected in Calvinistic circles. “My position does prefer Justin to Augustine, Erasmus to Luther, Wesley to Calvin, and Anderson to Lindsell on all these questions” (182-183).

It is the whole problem of a theological determinism which limits the availability of salvation which Pinnock loathes the most. It is for this reason that he can say, “Something ugly entered Christian theology through Augustine,” and that not even the reputations of Calvin and Luther can be “rescued” because of their beliefs in it (40). He uses words like “pessimism,” “harden,” “rigor,” and “severity” when characterising the theology of Augustine in this vein (37).

If Christians today, and particularly evangelicals, believe that people outside of Christianity are lost, Pinnock lays this unfortunate turn of events squarely at the feet of Augustine.

“Dark thoughts have clouded our minds. For centuries, thanks largely to the Augustinian tradition that has so influenced evangelicals, we have been taught that God chooses a few who will be saved and has decided not to save the vast majority of humanity” (19).

This has resulted in a “negative control belief” (19) that has cast a shadow on much soteriological thinking in evangelical circles. “Since Augustine, theology generally has not been informed by an optimism of salvation” (36).

Pinnock characterises Augustine’s thinking as “abysmal” (167), “harsh” (39), a “tragic and influential error” (24), bewitching (30), and an “unhappy development” (36) which requires a “strong stomach” (38, 167). The following quote gives a good, overall view of

⁴⁹ Thus Stanley Grenz can characterise Pinnock as an “anti-Augustinian theological reformist” (Callen: *Journey*, back cover).

Pinnock's opinion of how badly Augustine affected Christian theology, and with what he infected it.

“With Augustine a new and severe paradigm in theology was born, a package of dismal beliefs which would eat its way into the consciousness of the Western churches and erode the positive biblical spirit in their thinking. The approach is well-known to practically every Christian and non-Christian alike. It views every person as totally depraved, guilty for the sin of Adam as well as their own sins, completely unable to do anything other than sin, and deserving of everlasting conscious punishment in hell. But Christ, as a kind of third party, bore the punishment for those sinners fortunate enough to have been predestined to be saved. Meanwhile, the Spirit exercises God's power to compel them to accept the message by irresistible grace. Those unlucky enough to leave this life without having exercised explicit faith in Jesus Christ are almost certain to suffer in hell forever” (39).

The “harsh notions” which came with Augustine's theology, and were later to be found in Calvin's, include “soteriological predestination, total depravity, everlasting conscious torment in hell, strict limitations on who can be saved . . . and pessimism for anyone living beyond [the borders of the church]” (39).

Other similar comments could be gleaned from many of the works of Pinnock, but the above should suffice to provide a firm understanding of what he means when he speaks of a Augustinian or Calvinian theology to which he objects.

Moving to Pinnock's theological pilgrimage found in *Grace and Will*, there is much the same rationale used. In the introduction to the book, the authors note what precisely is the cause for their writing, and it is again the theological determinism which Pinnock has elsewhere identified as the poison seed from Augustine's theology.

“What concerns us is the dual fact that the determinist kind of theology, the type that subordinates God's love to the ideal of absolute power, is both highly influential and exceedingly harmful” (xi).

They recognise that many differences exist between the various evangelical traditions, yet on this point they must object.

Turning to Pinnock's personal journey, the first link to be broken in Pinnock's Calvinist chain had to do with the perseverance of the saints, what Pinnock considers to be the weakest link (*Grace & Will*, 17; all subsequent quotations from the same source until otherwise noted). He came to believe that this dogma of Calvinism could not stand up to both his

exegetical studies of the Book of Hebrews, nor to his own experience of God and the “profound mutuality in our dealings with God” (17-19).

“If in fact believers enjoy the kind of absolute security Calvinism had taught me they do, I found I could not make very good sense of the vigorous exhortations to persevere (e.g., 3:12) or the awesome warnings not to fall away from Christ (e.g., 10:26), which the book addresses to Christians” (17).

As noted previously, Pinnock identifies in modern culture an emphasis on human autonomy, but he now began to see it in Scripture as well, and it appeared to him that Calvinism ignored this autonomy and put in its place a “set of premundane, divine decrees” (18) which determined everything. Such an “all-determining fatalistic blueprint for history” (18) appeared to negate any true idea of human autonomy, so that Pinnock was left with a tension between God’s determining will and human freedom, one which he believed could no longer be adequately addressed by a solidly coherent Calvinistic system as commonly expressed in American evangelicalism.

He had become accustomed to a Calvinism which held a compatibilist view of human freedom which claimed that human actions could both be determined and free at the same time, but this was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain in his thinking. “Sometimes I would try to explain it, other times I would give up and call it an antinomy, but deep down I knew there was something amiss” (18). If everything in creation was predetermined by a divine blueprint, then it was disingenuous to claim that human actions were indeed “free.”

Thus, Christians do not persevere in their faith because God had previously decreed that they would, but simply because they exercise their human freedom to do so. This provided Pinnock with great relief in his theology, and made more real to him the biblical warnings to not abandon the faith.

This had widespread effects on all areas of his Calvinism. Pinnock uses many metaphors to convey this effect, such as a hole in the dike or pulling on one thread in a garment which then unravels (17). But his clearest metaphor is a musical one.

“Just as one cannot change the pitch of a single string on the violin without adjusting the others, so one cannot introduce a major new insight into a coherent system like Calvinian theology without having to reconsider many other issues” (18).

The next string to be retuned was the doctrine of predestination. Pinnock could no longer maintain the “horrible decree” (19) of Calvin, that God had preordained the reprobation of the damned, while only saving a relatively few number of the elect. With this realisation in hand,

and coupled with his understanding that God's dealings with humans is more fluid than Calvinism seems to allow, Pinnock was able to rework his understanding of election from an individualistic idea to one on a more corporate scale. Through Christ, God had not simply elected individuals for salvation. Rather, he had elected the whole human race, who could in its entirety potentially benefit from the atoning work of Christ. "Election is a corporate category and not oriented to the choice of individuals for salvation" (20).⁵⁰

Pinnock is not lax to point out that at the heart of his former errant way of thinking lay an Augustinian premise that "God determines all that happens in the world . . . and not all are to be saved in the end" (19). "Calvin's logic was impeccable as usual: God wills whatever happens, so if there are to be lost people, God must have willed it" (19). However, Pinnock considers this idea "morally intolerable" (19). The way to get around it is to remove the theological determinism that lay at the heart of Augustinian and Calvinian thinking. With God not willing everything that happens, it becomes easier to handle why there are people who are lost.

By moving the Calvinist understanding of election from an individualistic one to a corporate one, Pinnock was able to come to a theology which "far from arbitrarily excluding anybody, encompasses them all potentially" (20). This is important to note, and it reveals a greater Arminian tendency developing in Pinnock's thinking. Armed with a predestination based on the foreknowledge of God (19), Pinnock was able to see the message of salvation as going out to all people, with potentially all people having a chance at salvation.⁵¹ This was not the case with a Calvinism which limited salvation only to the elect. But it also comes into tension with an evangelicalism which says that Jesus did not just make salvation *possible*, but actually made it effective, a matter to which attention will be turned in later sections of this dissertation.

⁵⁰ Richard Rice echoes this same sentiment about corporate or "group" election in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994) 56. Rice notes that the biblical portrayal of election "primarily" or "fundamentally" or "typically" refers to groups, not individuals. However, he also recognises that at times it does refer to individuals, which then seems to beg the question. The Calvinists with whom inclusivists disagree believe that election involves individuals as well as groups. Inclusivists, though, emphasise the latter more than the former, but since the biblical data can be seen to support both individual and corporate election, the entire inclusivist argument for a *primary* usage of election which is corporate loses some of its weight. If election can indeed be individual, the Calvinist understanding of God electing individuals for salvation is not as vulnerable a notion as inclusivists would like to make it out to be.

⁵¹ At this point, Pinnock allowed for both explanations of election, a conditional one based on God's foreknowledge, and a corporate election instead of an individual one, so long as it was not an unconditional election as understood by Calvinists. It is important to note that at this time, Pinnock was not yet an open theist. Because Open Theism discards the notion that God can know the future choices free-willed creatures make, they do not accept the Arminian understanding of God's conditional election based on his foreknowledge. Pinnock would later entirely abandon the foreknowledge angle, although at this point in his pilgrimage it was still a real option. However, his understanding of corporate election of the entire human race would remain.

Next came human freedom.

“Having created human beings with relative autonomy alongside himself, God voluntarily limits his power to enable them to exist and to share in the divine creativity” (21).

From Pinnock’s viewpoint, Calvinism created an “antimony that required me to believe both that God determines all things and that creaturely freedom is real” (21). It can be seen that, starting with his new understanding of perseverance of the saints, Pinnock has placed human autonomy at a high value in his theological thinking.

The question that must be asked at this point is, does this high value on human autonomy come from a deeper understanding of Scripture, as Pinnock states, or from cultural pressure? Pinnock has noted that modern culture does place a high premium on human autonomy, and many of his critics have noted that this, and not biblical considerations, is the real motivating factor for why Pinnock abandoned his Calvinism and moved to a theological system more fit for the times.

As already seen, Pinnock does not find the antiquated theological systems of Augustine, Calvin, or Luther particularly appealing, either to himself or to the “believing masses.” From whence does this lack of appeal come? If it is a biblical motivation, it would be difficult to substantially prove that the believing masses have solid, biblical justifications for preferring C. S. Lewis to Augustine, for example, as Pinnock believes. Why, then, do they favour Arminian systems to Calvinist ones as Pinnock contends?

Pinnock himself claims biblical and theological motivations for preferring Arminius to Augustine, so evangelicals should take him at his word. But his broader claim about the “silent majority of Arminian evangelicals” is quite another matter. Would it not more logically follow that they prefer Arminianism because, as Pinnock has noted, their culture prefers it? Then Pinnock’s readers are at least partly left to wonder about Pinnock’s motivations as well.

In fact, there is an irony present in Pinnock’s use of Augustine. He notes, “Just as Augustine came to terms with ancient Greek thinking, so we are making peace with the culture of modernity” (27). Yet, as will be seen later, Pinnock chastises Augustine and others for accommodating Christian theology to Greek thought, especially when it comes to the person and nature of God. An entire chapter in *Most Moved Mover* is devoted to “Overcoming a Pagan Inheritance.” Augustine is again noted for allowing neo-Platonic thinking to cloud his Christian theology, putting God “in a kind of box” and preferring

“stability to change and being to becoming” (69). From this seed came further errors in the classical model of theism, errors which open theists like Pinnock hope to correct.

In fact, as the open theists argue, their view of God is the truly biblical one, not the one of Augustine and others who succumbed to Greek philosophical pressures when formulating their views on God. Therefore, it is ironic that Pinnock would find in himself characteristics of Augustine which Pinnock then criticises. Put another way, it is confusing at best that Pinnock can both congratulate Augustine for making Christian theology accommodate his cultural leanings, while at the same time reprimand him for doing so.

So which is it? Should Augustine be applauded for his “dazzling new insights,” or chastised for giving in to his neo-Platonic cultural pressures? Pinnock appears a bit inconsistent here. And his critics, ones which see Pinnock also giving in to cultural pressures which place a higher value on human autonomy, appear to have some validity in their complaints.

Moving back to Pinnock’s pilgrimage, considering the “five points” of Calvinism, conveniently represented in North America by the acronym TULIP (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irrresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints), it can be seen how Pinnock’s thinking has moved through these major tenets.⁵² By questioning the Calvinist notion of perseverance of the saints, Pinnock came to view God’s will as less forceful than this form of Calvinism tends to make it. Further, he made human will more instrumental in the whole salvation process, something that Arminianism naturally does. Unconditional election was replaced by a conditional one which was based on the Arminian understanding of God’s foreknowledge, (or later in Pinnock’s thinking an individual election replaced by a corporate election), and grace was no longer irresistible but resistible (“Grace works mightily but does not override”),⁵³ making the biblical warnings against apostasy more understandable.

Pinnock also found benefit in this shift in his thinking when it came to the issue of evil.

“The logic of consistent Calvinism makes God the author of evil and casts serious doubt on his goodness” (*Grace & Will*, 21).

The seeds of Open Theism were clearly sown early in this pilgrimage, although Pinnock himself would not come to adopt the full-blown system of Open Theism until much later. Evil is something which happens because God has created a universe where the possibility

⁵² Consult Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994) for a summary of this TULIP designation (596, n. 35).

⁵³ *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 157.

exists for free-willed creatures to go against God's will. This "risk" could only be possible because God had decided to limit himself. Otherwise, God would indeed be the author of evil as Pinnock sees in Calvinism. However, to allow for this system to be fully actualised, God must be refashioned, thus yielding an Open Theism system that will be investigated later.

Elsewhere, Pinnock expresses an apologetic benefit to this new theological insight. He believes that it allows for greater self-worth in the human and resonates with the human desire and hope that this life is truly worth something.

"Experience itself demands that beneath our human lives exists a ground in reality for confidence in the final worth of our existence. If there is no such ground, what is the point of anything?" (*Wideness*, 35).

Conversely, it is Calvinist determinism which kills all hope, for who really can act contrary to the way in which God has already preordained?

If the Calvinist understanding of unconditional election and perseverance of the saints was wrongheaded, what about the other three petals of the tulip? Pinnock realised that the notion of irresistible grace would seem to negate the autonomy of humans, but if human nature was totally depraved, what other possibility could exist?

Pinnock became intrigued by Wesley's idea of prevenient grace, even though "the Bible has no developed doctrine of universal prevenient grace, however convenient it would be for us if it did" (*Grace & Will*, 22). Given this deficiency in the doctrine of prevenient grace, Pinnock opted instead to question the notion of total depravity. Because he found that "Scripture appeals to people as those who are able and responsible to answer to God and not as those incapable of doing so," Pinnock abandoned the Calvinist understanding of depravity (22). Humans are "free and responsible agents" (22).⁵⁴

When earlier considering an extended quotation about what exactly from Augustine's theology had become part and parcel of North American evangelicalism, this comment from Pinnock was seen:

"It views every person as totally depraved, guilty for the sin of Adam as well as their own sins, completely unable to do anything other than sin, and deserving of everlasting conscious punishment in hell."

⁵⁴ It should be noted here that Pinnock, although moving in the direction of Arminianism in virtually every theological step that he took, did not in this one area. Jacob Arminius would not have agreed with Pinnock's assessment of human depravity. Here is found more of an Eastern Orthodox influence than Arminian, something that will be noted again later. This type of Wesleyan Arminianism is clearly explained in Stan Gundry (ed.), *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), where J. Steven Harper argues in his chapter for the Wesleyan Arminian view. Stephen M. Ashby argues in chapter 3 for "A Reformed Arminian View," and adeptly shows the differences between Jacob Arminius' and John Wesley's brand of Arminianism.

There is a tension here in Pinnock's formulation. It appears that he finds this teaching objectionable, as he includes it in his litany of errors from Augustine which have crept into evangelical theology. Yet this understanding of sin is so widespread in North American evangelicalism that to question it would naturally yield the accusation of heresy.

In spite of this potential problem, Pinnock sees a tension between "total depravity" and human autonomy and ability to act. He finds this as a general failing of evangelical thinking, but whereas many evangelicals would rather abandon human autonomy, Pinnock chooses to abandon total depravity. This again brings up the issue of why, and how much is Pinnock influenced by cultural preferences for human autonomy. To speak of human depravity does not play as well in modern culture as does human freedom.

Pinnock works hard to make it appear that his theology has remained strongly evangelical. In *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, Pinnock attacks John Hick's pluralism with incredible passion, and he gives no ground in many decidedly evangelical areas (eg., 60-64). Pinnock clearly is not interested in succumbing to cultural pressures which place a high premium on pluralism, so there should be an expectation that he is not just going to give in to cultural pressures when it comes to human autonomy.

But by not adopting the full-blown Arminianism of Jacob Arminius, and instead moving more in favour of that espoused by John Wesley, Pinnock has placed himself in a difficult situation. Now his theology comes under fire from both classical Calvinists and classical Arminians.

Pinnock recognises this dilemma when it comes to the substitutionary atonement of Christ. He appreciates that to claim to be an evangelical and to question the vicarious atonement would be a definite problem in North American evangelicalism.

"Assuming, as any evangelical would, that the Cross involved some kind of substitution in which Christ bore the guilt of human sin, where then does the human response fit into that?" (*Grace & Will*, 22).

With this statement, Pinnock recognises that under the umbrella term "evangelical," there is at least one nonnegotiable, that being the substitutionary atonement of Christ. In other words, a Christian would have no business referring to himself or herself as an "evangelical," without believing in the substitutionary death of Christ.

This explains why Pinnock does not abandon a substitutionary atonement, even though he recognises that such an atoning work has the possibility of violating human autonomy. As he notes, it would logically follow that "all those who were substituted for in the death of Christ would necessarily be saved and have the guilt of their sins automatically removed without any

action of theirs entering into it” (22). But Pinnock does not look to abandon substitutionary atonement, as have evangelicals such as the prominent Anglican scholar from the United Kingdom, Steve Chalke, in whose theology there are otherwise considerable similarities with North American open theists.⁵⁵

Pinnock asks, “What kind of substitution, if unlimited in scope, does not entail absolute universalism in salvation?” (23). It is important to note that Pinnock does not ask what kind of atonement can there be without it being substitutionary. To do so would most likely eliminate any chance he would have of referring to himself as an “evangelical,” at least in North America.⁵⁶

Many Christians believe that the easiest petal on the tulip of Calvinism to discard is that of limited atonement, but Pinnock saw a problem with a too-quick solution. In his thinking, he must maintain a substitutionary atonement, and it must be universal, otherwise a Calvinist understanding of election would logically follow. But a universal atoning work of Christ implied a universal salvation, so reasoned Pinnock. The problem became, then, how to avoid a limited atonement without adopting universalism, which Pinnock saw as equally problematic (23).⁵⁷

This could be done as long as Pinnock “reduce[d] the precision” (23) of what it means for Christ to be a substitutionary atonement.

“Christ’s death on behalf of the race evidently did not automatically secure for anyone an actual reconciled relationship with God, but made it possible for people to enter into such a relationship by faith” (23).

This jibes well with Pinnock’s earlier recognition that election could be universal in potential, thus encompassing all of humanity, yet in actuality not necessarily saving all of humanity.

Of course, this understanding of Christ’s atonement could potentially yield the salvation of no one, a point which Pinnock never addresses specifically as such, but which could be

⁵⁵ The doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement has been labelled by Chalke as “cosmic child abuse,” and his views have caused an uproar within the Evangelical Alliance in the United Kingdom. Among his writings on this topic include “Cross Purposes,” *Christianity* (September 2004) 44-48, and a book co-authored with Alan Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003). Although not within the scope of this dissertation, the argument is of note simply because it involves the matter of God’s judgment. Chalke and others object to penal substitution on several grounds, most notably because the idea of retribution should not be attributed to God. The debate has reached American shores mainly through Professor Joel Green of Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky, and via a work he co-authored with Mark Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000).

⁵⁶ It would be easier for Pinnock to abandon a substitutionary atoning work of Christ in a cultural environment which emphasises human autonomy and pluralism, but Pinnock does not abandon this key evangelical belief.

⁵⁷ A universal salvation must also be avoided according to Pinnock because it violates human autonomy.

understood within his idea of God taking risks. Some may be tempted to argue that at least with the limited atonement of Calvinism, some of the human race are guaranteed to be saved. But Pinnock would find this objectionable, preferring instead a system which allows for the potential of salvation, but does not make it certain. Both a limited and universal salvation negate human autonomy, and maintaining human freedom is much preferred to none at all, even if it involves greater risk.

This “reduced precision” in his understanding of the atonement caused Pinnock to gain more appreciation for the atonement theories of Anselm and Grotius because they both emphasised the atonement more as judicial demonstration than individual substitution (23). Pinnock also recognised some similarities between his newly-formed theology and that of Karl Barth, at least in the notion of corporate election. But Barth’s theology leaned too heavily toward the objective element of salvation instead of the subjective. “My main hesitation lay in the need to place greater stress on the human appropriation of this saving act” (23).

All of these changes have necessitated a “paradigm shift in [his] biblical hermeneutic” (21). “I am learning to read the Bible from a new point of view” (21). Pinnock objects to the attacks that say he has become more rationalist (18); he believes himself to actually be more evangelical as a result of his new theological spectacles (21).

Thus, in roughly two decades Pinnock had moved from a theological system which was strictly Calvinist to one which was thoroughly Arminian. He fashioned a theology which moved from a theological determinism where God predestined all things, to one in which humans became “co-workers with God” (20), and able to affect the future apart from pre-ordained decrees by God.

Yet, this was not good enough, because even the classical theism of evangelicalism, be it the one espoused by Calvinism or the virtually identical theism of Arminianism, had to also be altered. This would involve a reworking of the understanding of God’s immutability, his timelessness, and his omniscience. These specific matters will be dealt with later.⁵⁸

This leaves the question of what lay at the heart of Pinnock’s inclusivism. Pinnock’s Theology and Soteriology – how God is in his very nature, and how he relates to his creation – seem to have been more motivated by negative factors than positive ones. Put another way,

⁵⁸ Interestingly, John Hick also provides a theological pilgrimage for the reasons why he eventually abandoned evangelicalism for pluralism (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 29-32; see also *An Interpretation of Religions*, Yale University Press, 1990). Although not within the scope of this dissertation, it would be interesting to compare the pilgrimages of Hick and Pinnock and see why one ultimately moved from exclusivism to pluralism, while the other stopped short at inclusivism.

Pinnock's theological pilgrimage appears to move *away* from something more than moving *toward* something. In virtually everything he says about his pilgrimage, it is almost always couched in negative language concerning Calvinism and its underlying Augustinianism, as opposed to the positive elements of Arminianism which attracted him.

This is perhaps no more clearly evident than in his view of the typically evangelical understanding of the fate of those who have never heard the gospel. Because this issue affects nearly half of the current population of the world, and has certainly affected the majority of humanity, it is no small issue. How one answers the question, "What eternally happens to people who have never heard the gospel of Jesus?" will directly impinge upon one's understanding of God.

Of course, the exact opposite can also be said. One's understanding of God will directly impinge upon the answer to the question concerning the fate of the unevangelised. Pinnock recognises this intimate relationship between Theology and Soteriology when he asks,

"What kind of God would send large numbers of men, women, and children to hell without the remotest chance of responding to his truth? This does not sound like the God whom Jesus called Father" (*Wideness*, 154).

This is the starting point. According to Pinnock, the historical, evangelical understanding of salvation as limited to those who profess faith in Jesus (what has been termed exclusivism) is untenable because it does not correspond with the picture of the Father as portrayed in the teaching of Jesus.

John Sanders makes the inclusivist motivations even clearer to see.⁵⁹ He writes: "What happens to people who have never heard the Gospel?" is "far and away . . . the most-asked apologetic question on United States college campuses" (*Three Views*, 7). He notes three main reasons why the question is asked: 1) because if the exclusivist answer is the correct one, this makes God out to be evil, 2) simple statistics show that Christianity, although growing in numbers is actually decreasing in terms of percentage of the world's population, and 3) more and more Christians are coming into contact with people of other faith (8).

Therefore, in walking through the main beliefs of inclusivism, the following path will be taken. Inclusivism is clearly driven by its picture of God who is love. This emphasis drives

⁵⁹ At the time he wrote the book which made him immediately recognisable in inclusivist circles, *No Other Name*, Sanders was an instructor at Oak Hills Bible College in Minnesota and an adjunct professor of philosophy at Bemidji State University. He received a doctorate from the University of South Africa and his dissertation ("Divine Providence as Risk-Taking," DTh dissertation, University of South Africa, 1996) formed the basis of another of his groundbreaking works, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998). He became professor of philosophy at Huntingdon College in Indiana, a United Brethren institution, although his position went under review and was eventually terminated due to the volatility that had been created due to his adoption of Open Theism.

the inclusivist understanding of the autonomy of humans via the basic understanding that a loving God would allow for more human freedom than typically allowed in traditional evangelical, and especially Calvinist, systems. Even the inclusivist view of hell is driven by this understanding of human autonomy, so it is here that this study must begin.

This loving picture of God comes mainly from the teaching of Jesus, as opposed to more “cruel and peevish” depictions found elsewhere in the Scriptures, mainly in the Old Testament. Therefore, a survey of the key teachings of Jesus used in this regard must follow.

An emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit is fundamental to inclusivism, and Pinnock has even espoused a Christology which is more Spirit-centred than Logos-centred.⁶⁰ From this strong Pneumatology comes an openness to other faiths and peoples where Jesus is not known, based on the argument that God’s Spirit is nevertheless present. There is also an openness to a natural theology which is more typically found in Catholic than evangelical circles, and this again is due to the role that the Spirit plays in God’s creation.

Some of the main tenets of Open Theism will then be discussed, but only in a way which impinges upon the subject of this dissertation. Specifically, that will involve those attributes of God which inclusivists see as misconstrued by typical evangelicals, classical theism’s views concerning God’s immutability, timelessness, and omniscience. In each instance, the main issue is whether or not the classical view allows for God to truly interact in a loving way with his creatures.

Then any bibliological factors which play a part in inclusivism will be noted. What are the key texts they use to support their position? How do they approach Scripture, and is it in a way acceptable to the wider evangelical community? Lastly, consideration will be given for the specific soteriological implications of inclusivism, their movement away from the traditional view of hell, and their view of Christian missions.

All of the above yields, but is also driven by, the desire inclusivists have to see more people saved than is typically allowed for in evangelicalism.

2.1 Human Freedom and the Love of God

There is a tendency within inclusivism and Open Theism to make love the most important attribute of God, apparently to the exclusion of other, more negative ones such as wrath or justice. For example, Pinnock wants to maintain a “hermeneutic of hopefulness” (*Wideness*, 20) whereby Christians read the Bible with eyes for the love of God and not the darker aspects

⁶⁰ He also suggests that Bibliology should come under Pneumatology (see *The Scripture Principle*, 255), something which will be considered in greater detail later.

which according to Pinnock have been typically concentrated on by evangelicals. Professor of theology at Loma Linda University, Richard Rice, agrees: “Love is the most important quality we attribute to God” (*Openness*, 15).

Elsewhere, in *Most Moved Mover*,⁶¹ Pinnock makes this point much more explicitly:

“Love is more than an attribute; it is God’s very nature” (81).

“Wrath does not belong to God’s nature in the way that love does” (83).

“If theologians would restore love to their thinking about God’s nature, the road would be open to the open view of God, which is a theology of love” (82).

Stanley E. Porter comments on his McMaster Divinity College colleague concerning this very issue when he writes that Pinnock “constructs an entire theology around this notion” that God is love.⁶²

In Sanders’ redefinition of the attributes of God, wrath does not even feature. It is, rather, an “instrument in the divine hands, not an attribute of God” (*Risks*, 84). He also refers to it as “secondary” and “not an essential attribute” (84). “All attempts to balance wrath (or justice) with love as equal attributes of God are misplaced” (85).

Seventh-Day Adventist pastor and theologian Fritz Guy concurs: “In the reality of God, love is more fundamental than, and prior to, justice or power” (*Grace & Will*, 35). Also, “In the character of God, love is more fundamental than control” (33). Rice echoes this sentiment when he says, “According to the Bible, God is not a center of infinite power who happens to be loving, he is loving above all else” (*Openness*, 21).

When looking at Clark Pinnock’s theological pilgrimage, implicit in his understanding of Calvinist and Augustinian theology was a premium placed on divine sovereignty at the expense of divine love. It was noted by the inclusivist authors of *Grace & Will* that absolute power had somehow been given more importance in evangelical theology than God’s love. They believed that a correction was needed.

Thus, in Pinnock’s reformulated theology, unconditional election was replaced by a universal, corporate election. Although the Calvinist understanding of unconditional election still has God’s love as a motivating factor, this is apparently not good enough for inclusivists unless that love is shown equally to all people. The same can be said concerning limited atonement, which appears to Pinnock and other inclusivists as narrow and arbitrary. Only a universal atonement rightly portrays God’s love.

⁶¹ *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).

⁶² Noted in *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* by I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004) 110, n.31.

So it should be understood that “God is love” is not just the definitive understanding that is needed, according to inclusivists and open theists. An exclusivist evangelical will certainly speak of “for God so loved the world,” so the problem should not be that inclusivists see in exclusivism an entire neglect of the love of God. Rather, what they see is that not enough emphasis is laid on it. And in their thinking, only when God treats all people equally, with no preference given to one over another as appears in unconditional election, can Christians properly speak of the love of God.

Therefore, it is better to speak of God being “more loving” in an inclusivist system, when compared with an exclusivist one. According to Pinnock, then, an Arminian system better portrays the love of God than does a Calvinist one.

Yet, even with a careful reading of inclusivists one does not get this impression entirely. It would be helpful to see Pinnock, for example, go through the plethora of material from John Calvin which speaks of God’s love, yet he does not do so. At times it serves his purposes better to portray Augustinian and Calvinist theology as rather unloving, even harsh and cruel depictions of God, but this is not a particularly fair representation. Rather than coming away with the impression that inclusivism is “more loving” than exclusivism, his readers rather come away with the impression that inclusivism is loving and exclusivism is not, that Arminianism entirely portrays the love of God and Calvinism does not at all. This is a most unfortunate caricature of the systems which are contra-inclusivism.

Even the topic of total depravity can be linked to this perspective. Intimately associated with this understanding of love as the supreme attribute or characteristic of God is the freedom of humans and the belief that true love cannot be forced or coerced. A fair representation of this position can be seen in this comment by a prominent inclusivist, former professor at Gordon College William MacDonald:

“The divine call was never coercive. Nowhere in all Jesus’ parables and teaching does he portray a God-figure who compels compliance with his wishes, or overrides individual freedom to force his good will on anybody.”⁶³

Interestingly, this is precisely what another prominent inclusivist, Gregory Boyd, proclaims. Boyd is very clear in his pronouncements that “the possibility of love requires self-determining freedom” and “love must be freely chosen.”⁶⁴ Pinnock’s comment is similar: “Forced love is a contradiction in terms” (*Flame*, 75).

⁶³ William G. MacDonald, “The Biblical Doctrine of Election,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 213.

⁶⁴ All quotations from Boyd in this section come from *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

Boyd sees a dignity in human freedom which God cannot revoke. “While he detests what they choose, he nevertheless continues to love the dignity inherent in these creatures that allows them to choose it” (343).

In Boyd’s apologetic concerning why evil exists in God’s creation, he places in the first position of six theses, “love must be freely chosen.”⁶⁵ Without real freedom, love cannot exist. Therefore, Boyd concludes, God is willing to risk and endure evil in his creation in order to possibly yield creatures which love him of their own freewill. “God cannot avoid the possibility of these nightmares without also cancelling out the possibility of love” (215).

Genuine love cannot be “forced,” and God values love that comes voluntarily from the creature.⁶⁶ Open theists as if with one voice decry the typical Calvinism that has dominated much of the Soteriology of American evangelicalism, especially as it relates to the doctrine of election. If God truly elects those who will be saved, and this is done prior to their existence and hence ability to make their own choice, this would appear to make their love for God forced or coerced. As inclusivist Vernon White notes, “The highest good includes the free repentance of the will of offenders.”⁶⁷

In fact, human freedom presupposes a certain limitation on the part of God to act unilaterally. This must be accepted in any inclusivist understanding, but most especially in that inclusivism which has blossomed into Open Theism. Therefore, Richard Rice can say:

“Where human decision is presupposed, however, God cannot achieve his objectives unilaterally. He requires our cooperation” (*Openness*, 56).

Earlier, Rice already stated that God’s divine predestination has the potential of failing, even though he does not provide specific examples of this from Scripture. Rather, he deduces it from the fact that the biblical portrait of God is one where “God has often experienced frustration and disappointment” (56). However, there is a big difference between frustration and failed predestination, one would think.

Still, Rice must maintain the possibility of God’s failure if he is to allow human autonomy, as inclusivists and open theists intend to do. This makes sense, though, because God does not exhaustively know the future choices of free-willed beings. Thus, he can be wrong.

⁶⁵ The other five premises are: 2) love entails risk, 3) love entails moral responsibility, 4) moral responsibility is proportionate to the potential to influence others, 5) the power to influence is irrevocable, and 6) the power to influence is finite.

⁶⁶ For similar comments, see Pinnock, *Flame*, 57, 75.

⁶⁷ *Atonement and Incarnation: An Essay in Universalism and Particularity* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) 68.

“Instead of perceiving the entire course of human existence in one timeless moment, God comes to know events as they take place. He learns something from what transpires” (16).

The existence of a “learning God” is necessary for the inclusivist understanding of human autonomy. If God knows everything, then human freedom is a figment and not a reality. Therefore, “For God to will something . . . does not make its occurrence inevitable” (26), because God has allowed human freedom, in essence, to at times thwart his own wishes and desires. John Sanders calls humans in this regard, “minicreators” (*Grace & Will*, 176).

Professor of philosophy at Huntington College, William Hasker, sees in this reality the same apologetic benefit that Pinnock saw when it comes to evil. According to inclusivists, Calvinism when logically taken to its final conclusion ultimately makes God the author of evil. Because all events in God’s creation are the result of God’s divine predestination, even evil must be said to be according to the will of God.

But when human autonomy is allowed to exist to the degree that inclusivists believe it exists, the problem of evil and God’s will melts away. As Hasker notes:

“God does not *permit* the evil, because God could not *prevent* the evils from occurring” (*Openness*, 139, emphasis original).

The teaching of total depravity as typically found in Calvinism, then, would negate this necessary human autonomy. So too would the Calvinist understanding of perseverance of the saints and irresistible grace. Based on these two motivations – the love of God and the freewill of humans – Pinnock’s theological pilgrimage eliminated all five petals on the Calvinist tulip. In every objection that he had against Calvinism, either or both of these factors is the reason why he abandoned Calvinism for a more-Arminian system.

It was noted in Pinnock’s pilgrimage that he does not take the final leap to universalism, despite his affinity for a universal atonement by Christ. What is holding him back from making such a soteriological decision? It is Pinnock’s desire to allow room for human freedom. Pinnock’s Arminianism of a decidedly Wesleyan variety becomes very clear when considering how exactly salvation is affected in individuals and why he does not ultimately embrace universalism. Several statements from *Flame of Love* are worth quoting in this regard:

“We have only to accept what has been done and allow the Spirit to conform our lives to Christ” (96).

“All humanity has the potential to be the children of God, because all were included in his representation. What remains is for everyone to be reconciled to God personally and subjectively” (100).

“In faith we add our yes to God’s prior yes” (109).

“The cross benefits all those who let themselves be linked with his death through baptism” (110).

Human freedom is the one nonnegotiable in Pinnock’s gambit. Had God decided to make salvation universal, he would have had to ignore the freedom of his creatures to reject it.⁶⁸ Had he made it limited, the same would apply. Therefore, in some way God had to offer salvation, not affect it but simply offer it, in order to preserve both his loving character and human autonomy.

Thus even the important evangelical tenet of vicarious atonement had to be reconfigured in some fashion to allow for this understanding of human freedom. As noted earlier, if Jesus truly stood in the place of every human being, then their freedom would in some way be violated. Therefore, he could die on the cross only as a *potential* substitution, but that substitution would only be affected once the individual makes the personal choice to appropriate it.

Given these two main foci, the love of God and the freewill of humans, most inclusivists have also had to alter the traditional view of hell as a place of eternal, conscious torment. This is done because such a place seems to negate a picture of God who is infinitely loving, and it violates human freedom by forcing people to endure something they do not want to endure. Inclusivists frequently reference the comment by C. S. Lewis that the doors of hell are locked from the inside.⁶⁹ In other words, those who are in hell are there of their own freewill. In fact, they want to be there and that is why they are the ones who lock the doors.

Pinnock makes this point clear:

“How can one reconcile this doctrine [eternal, conscious hell] with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Is he not a God of boundless mercy? How then can we project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness? Torturing people without end is not the sort of thing the “Abba” Father of Jesus would do” (*Four Views on Hell*, 140).

⁶⁸ See also *Wideness*, 156. Alistair McGrath also recognises this: “Universalism denies humanity the right to say no to God” (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 177).

⁶⁹ *The Problem of Pain* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962) 128.

Reflecting the teaching of C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*, Pinnock makes this comment:

“Hell is not the prison from which people are longing to be set free, but a sit-in where sinners have barricaded themselves in to keep God out” (*Wideness*, 180).

Similarly, Capon states: “The sole difference, therefore, between Hell and Heaven is that in Heaven the forgiveness is accepted and passed along, while in Hell it is rejected and blocked” (*Parables of Grace*, 50).⁷⁰

Inclusivists have looked for other options to the traditional view of hell. The three main options are annihilationism, post-mortem evangelism, and “middle knowledge.”⁷¹ Pinnock is cited as an advocate of post-mortem evangelism in *No Other Name* (261) and *Wideness* (168-175), both published in 1992. But he states in 1994 to not hold to that position (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 148), and in *Four Views on Hell* is the author of the article on annihilationism.⁷² Boyd’s picture of eternal judgment is a modified annihilationism which relies heavily on the views of C. S. Lewis.⁷³ And Fackre and Bloesch posit “post-mortem evangelism,” where people still have the opportunity to hear the gospel and make a choice even after they die.⁷⁴

Pinnock’s comment about the traditional view of hell is worth quoting in full:

“I conclude that the traditional belief that God makes the wicked suffer in an unending conscious torment in hell is unbiblical, is fostered by a Hellenistic view of human nature, is detrimental to the character of God, is defended on essentially pragmatic grounds, and is being rejected by a growing number of biblically

⁷⁰ Of course, an eternal, conscious hell has not only been objected to by inclusivists. Consider Baird’s comment over forty years ago: “It has about it a vindictiveness that offends against Jesus’ teaching about the love of God,” *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM Press Ltd. 1963) 230.

⁷¹ It should be noted that it is here on the issue of middle knowledge that many inclusivists and open theists part ways. Because open theists do not believe that God can know the future choices of free-willed beings, the middle knowledge of God must be excluded as a possibility. Middle knowledge is the understanding that God knows what people *would* choose when faced with a choice, even if they are never actually faced with that choice in reality. It is then argued that even if people have not heard the gospel, based on God’s middle knowledge, he does know what they would have chosen had they heard the gospel, and thus judges them on that basis. This is an unacceptable option for open theists.

⁷² More recently, he is listed as an adherent of annihilationism in Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity & Diversity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002) 329.

⁷³ The final chapter (12) in *Satan and the Problem of Evil* provides a picture of what Boyd envisions hell to be. Therein Boyd quotes Lewis at least a dozen times. Boyd mentions later in an appendix that he also finds the position of post-mortem evangelism appealing (380-385).

⁷⁴ Of course, post-mortem evangelism only moves the ultimate question of hell one step further. Even after faced with the post-mortem choice, scholars must decide where people who then reject Christ end up. Suffice it to say that few inclusivists still maintain the traditional view of hell, for reasons given above. Fackre deals extensively with post-mortem evangelism in *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984) 232-237, and “The Scandals of Particularity and Universality,” *Midstream* 22 (Jan. 1983) 32-52.

faithful, contemporary scholars. I believe that a better case can be made for understanding the nature of hell as termination – better biblically, anthropologically, morally, judicially, and metaphysically” (*Four Views on Hell*, 165).⁷⁵

Therefore, it should be recognised that in every important tenet of inclusivist teaching, these two theological prongs of motivation exist: the love of God as his attribute *par excellence*, and a human freedom which cannot be violated without violating this love of God. Any critique of inclusivism must deal adequately with these motivations.

2.2 The “God of Jesus”

Central to the inclusivist arguments about the nature of salvation and the love of God is the teaching of Jesus. Time and time again, the portrayal of the love of the Father by Jesus his Son is made supreme in their arguments for a kinder, gentler picture of God and salvation than has traditionally been painted by evangelicalism. Historic exclusivism has been cast as harsh and cruel, and entirely at odds with the image Jesus gives of his Father. Pinnock even compares exclusivists to the Pharisees in their unwillingness to allow God’s grace to be shown outside their religious and theological circles (*Flame*, 212-213).

If the inclusivists are correct at this point, it would go a long way to substantiating their position. Thus it is wise to thoroughly investigate this argument. A sampling of inclusivist statements concerning this issue is helpful.

“Jesus preached good news and did not come to condemn the world (Jn. 3:18). He was not a hellfire preacher, though he spoke of hell. Our emphasis, like his, should be on God’s extravagant love of human beings, not on God’s anger” (*Flame*, 191).

“My reply is that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not a merciless God, as they [exclusivists] suggest in their model, and therefore will not behave in the severe way they propose” (*Four Views*, 145).

“What kind of God would send large numbers of men, women, and children to hell without the remotest chance of responding to this truth? This does not sound like the God whom Jesus called Father” (*Wideness*, 154; also 89, for a similar argument by Pinnock for how Jesus’ depiction of God is actually contrary to that given in the Old Testament).

⁷⁵ By “termination” Pinnock means the view commonly referred to in evangelical circles as “annihilationism,” i.e., those who die apart from the saving life of Christ cease to exist.

The above all come from Pinnock, but other inclusivists express similar sentiments. John Sanders makes the teaching of Jesus central to his inclusivism (*God Who Risks*, 90), as does Fritz Guy (*Grace & Will*, 33) and in the same book, William MacDonald (212-213).⁷⁶

Richard Rice emphasises this point so strongly that he is worth an extended quotation in this regard, from *The Openness of God*:

“The fundamental claim here is not simply that God revealed himself in Jesus, but that God revealed himself in Jesus *as nowhere else*. In this specific human life, as never before or since, nor anywhere else in the sphere of creaturely existence, God expresses his innermost reality. Accordingly, from a Christian standpoint it is appropriate to say not only that *Jesus is God*, but that *God is Jesus*. For Christians, Jesus defines the reality of God” (39, emphasis original).

If humans truly want to know how God would act toward those people who die and never hear the gospel, their fundamental investigation should come from Jesus Christ. That is why Rice can later say that the “clearest insights into the nature of God appear in the teachings of Jesus about his heavenly Father” (40). Noting the very strong appeal by inclusivists, then, to the revelation of God found in Jesus Christ, later investigation will determine how solid this argument is. Various aspects of the teaching of Jesus will be considered, as each relates to key suppositions by inclusivism.

When looking specifically at the teaching of Jesus, the parables which emphasise the love and forgiveness of God are at the forefront of inclusivism’s coverage. For example, the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32) speaks of the love and forgiveness of the Father, which in turn produces an “optimism of salvation” for inclusivists, as opposed to what they consider to be the typical “fewness doctrine” of traditional evangelicalism (*Wideness*, 31).

Even passages which seem to clearly speak of the fewness of those who are ultimately saved, such as Jesus’ statement about the wide and narrow paths (Mt. 7:13-14), are explained away by inclusivists in their desire to maintain a wide and open path for salvation. Fritz Guy attempts a figurative explanation for this teaching (*Grace & Will*, 44), and Pinnock says this passage has nothing to do with the relative numbers of people spending an eternity in one of two places.

“I do not think that this text about fewness can be used to cancel out the optimism of salvation that so many other verses articulate” (*Wideness*, 154).

⁷⁶ Pluralist John Hick uses similar arguments (*Four Views*, 250).

Other parables like the Sheep and Goats (Mt. 25:31-46) are used by inclusivists to bolster their understanding that explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ is not necessary to be saved by him. Rather, all those who perform good works pleasing to God and his Son can be deemed “sheep” in the final separation. The Sheep and Goats is their primary text for teaching that God favours people, regardless of their faith, so long as they act morally.

Pinnock makes good use of this parable. In *Four Views*, he claims that the “seed of faith” is evident in those who act like the sheep of this parable (254; also 119). In *Wideness*, he even goes further and uses this parable as proof of the “salvation of the unevangelized” (163-165). They have in essence served Christ through their good deeds, even though they did not know him.

“Those who confess Christ and those who do not are judged alike by the extent to which they walk in the way of the Son of Man” (165).

Sanders notes that this is a shift in Pinnock’s theology, as previously he did not view this parable in a quite so optimistic fashion (*No Other Name*, 259).⁷⁷

In *Wideness*, Pinnock includes his understanding of the Sheep and Goats in a section devoted to types of people he believes are saved even though they did not have explicit knowledge of Jesus. These groups include pagan saints both from the Old Testament (161) and the New (165), babies who die in infancy and the mentally incompetent (166), and the Jews who lived before Jesus (163). All of these people are examples of unevangelised individuals who were nonetheless saved.

The pagan saints argument will be dealt with extensively later as it forms an integral part of inclusivist argumentation. Considering infants and the mentally incompetent, it is interesting to note that Pinnock does not grant them automatic salvation. This would apparently violate their human freedom. Therefore, he comes up with the rather creative suggestion that such people are “given time to grow up and mature, so then a decision could be made” post-mortem (168). He then gives a defence of such post-mortem conversions for the better part of five pages.

This teaching from Jesus of the Sheep and Goats is often coupled with Peter’s comments in Acts 10:35, where he says that God “accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (*Wideness*, 32; *Four Views*, 254; *Grace & Will*, 215; *Flame*, 180, 195, 202).

⁷⁷ The same argument from morality is used by pluralists as well. See Paul Knitter’s article, “Toward a Liberation Theology” in John Hick and Paul Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988). “Simply stated, from their ethical, soteriological fruits we shall know them – we shall be able to judge whether and how much other religious paths and their mediators are salvific” (193, emphasis original).

Assent to theological propositions is not necessary so long as a person has a “relationship of trust in God which manifests itself in godly living” (*Flame*, 195). However, such teaching has been condemned by critics of inclusivism as sounding too much like a works-righteousness, one that the Protestant Reformation decidedly denounced.

There appears to be a confusion between saying, as the inclusivists do, that Jesus is the only Saviour of the world, and contending that good, honest people of other faiths are saved simply by doing those things which Jesus would have approved, even though they have no explicit awareness of Christ and his teaching. If the Parable of the Sheep and Goats truly does teach what inclusivists claim it teaches, how can inclusivists continue to disagree with pluralists who say that all religions are equally valid ways to God? If helping the needy, visiting the prisoners, and giving water to the thirsty are acts which give people access to heaven – regardless of one’s religious affiliation – how can inclusivists say that non-Christian religions are not in themselves salvific? These important questions will be breached later when dealing more specifically with the inclusivist understanding of non-Christian faiths.

At this point, though, Pinnock appears to foresee such objections. He prefers not to emphasise the good works themselves, but rather the “faith principle” that is involved with the unevangelised. Moral people of other religious traditions can be saved, not simply because they did something good, but because they possessed a saving faith, even if not expressly in Jesus. This faith principle, Pinnock contends, has been held by past evangelicals and church fathers such as Justin, Clement, Zwingli, and Wesley (*Wideness*, 158). Vatican II is also cited as holding this position (159).

This seems to mute those objections against Pinnock and other inclusivists that they are simply teaching a works-righteousness which is at odds with traditional Protestant teaching. Even if people are “informationally premissianic” (161), they may still respond in faith to the light of revelation they have been given by God (158). Because the redemption of Christ is universal, so too must access to it be universal, even if the name of Jesus is not explicitly known (159).

However, is this not simply semantics? If a person who does not know about Jesus is saved because he or she has done good works, how can this be construed as acceptable within the wider evangelical understanding of salvation by faith and not by works? Simply claiming a “faith principle” appears to beg the question of what this “faith” is placed in? If in God, then which picture of God? Can inclusivists truly contend that a Muslim adherent - one who denies the Trinity, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the atonement, and the resurrection of Jesus - is saved simply by doing good works? Then what of the Jew, such as Saul of Tarsus?

These matters will be revisited later, but for now it appears problematic for inclusivists to insist they stand within the stream of evangelicalism, while appearing to approve of a soteriological system which teaches the salvation of morally good people on the grounds of their good deeds.

Along similar lines, Jesus' teaching concerning good and bad trees and their fruit (Mt. 7:15-20) is also used by inclusivists as a general rule which applies to all people. Pinnock cites this passage when he provides two criteria for recognising truth in non-Christian religions (*Wideness*, 97). Missionary lecturer and inclusivist Daniel Clendenin also points to this passage as support for an inclusivist understanding of people in non-Christian religions who pursue righteousness, noting the pagan saints argument (*Many Gods*, 80-81). Clendenin goes on to say:

“To inclusivists, when asking about a person's salvation, the ethical criterion of righteousness is as important as the cognitive or epistemological criterion of confessing Christ in words” (81).

But this can be a bit misleading. When there is no epistemological criterion, the ethical criterion is apparently good enough. This can hardly be construed in the way Clendenin says it, “as important as.” The ethical criterion appears to be all that is needed. If there is an epistemological criterion present, inclusivists still maintain that an ethical criterion must also be present. Some clarity from inclusivists would be helpful here.

If God did not allow for such a faith principle, one through which salvation can be obtained via an ethical criterion when no cognitive criterion is present, then God would not be loving, according to inclusivism. The loving thing to do would be to offer salvation to every individual, even if that offer takes decidedly different forms. To some who have little light, God still allows them to exercise human freedom to respond. To those who have heard explicitly about Jesus Christ, they still must positively respond. This soteriological system best corresponds with the teaching of Jesus concerning the Father's love.

Thus, Pinnock can say, “The decisive element in Jesus' teaching and acting was the communication of a sense of the boundlessness of God's grace to sinners” (*Wideness*, 31). This is, again, the control factor in an inclusivist understanding of salvation. Unconditional election, limited atonement, even irresistible grace, are not proper theological vehicles through which God's boundless love should be conveyed.

It should be noted that inclusivists do not place so much emphasis on other portions of the New Testament revelation as they do on the teaching of Jesus. Certainly, they use the New

Testament when appropriate, but when attempting to speak of the great love of the Father, the teaching of Jesus plays a central and at times almost exclusive role.

However, Pinnock does attempt to show from the canonical books outside of the gospels that there is an optimism of salvation based on the loving reach of the Father in all parts of the world and at all times. But it is hard to see how Pinnock's arguments specifically support inclusivism at the negation of exclusivism.

For example, Pinnock begins with Paul's speech at Lystra. "In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony" (Acts 14:16-17). This Pinnock says "represents a gracious and understanding appreciation of their past and their culture" (*Wideness*, 32), but it is difficult to see how Pinnock can say this. Unfortunately, that is all he says about this passage. Other references to this biblical passage later in the book (eg., 96, 104, 139) do not specifically address this matter again.

Pinnock then moves to Paul's speech at Athens, from which he can say, "Evidently Paul thought of these people as believers in a certain sense, in a way that could be and should be fulfilled in Jesus Christ" (32). Unfortunately, there is not a more-thorough exegesis of this Acts 17 passage provided here, although later Pinnock uses the same argument when he speaks of the "evil side" of religious traditions. There he notes that Paul, when looking at the religious idolatry of the Athenians, was greatly troubled (90).

However, a little later in the same book, Pinnock notes that Paul's recognition that the Athenians were "very religious" was an acknowledgment of the image of God in humanity (102). So Paul apparently was both pleased and distressed by what he saw in the Athenian worship. Exclusivist evangelicalism tends to see only negative in Paul's encounter with the Athenians, and their need to repent and trust in Christ. But Pinnock sees both good and bad, albeit more of the former than the latter. "Apparently the apostle is open to whatever truth or goodness he happens to come across, whatever the context" (33).

The further examples from Paul's epistles used by Pinnock to bolster his point of a universal optimism of salvation include the fact that Jesus is the cosmic Christ and identified with the power of creation (33), that he is represented as the last Adam, the Saviour of the world, the one Mediator between God and humankind, and the one through whom God has reconciled the whole world (34).

Yet it is difficult to precisely see how these examples specifically support inclusivism at the omission of exclusivism, since exclusivist evangelicals commonly speak of Jesus, for example, as the only Saviour and Mediator. Because Jesus is referred to as the second Adam does not automatically bar a Calvinist understanding of limited atonement. Yet at times

Pinnock appears to just assume that these passages must, because he provides little further substantiation for his claims.

What would perhaps be more helpful would be to see Pinnock deal with some of the more pessimistic statements of the New Testament, ones which speak of the wrath of God and even of the Son, but there is very little coverage of such passages throughout his writings. He prefers these types of quick glances at passages rather than in-depth analysis and reflection. For example, it is difficult upon reading the entire passage of Paul's encounter with the Athenians to come away with the notion that the Athenian religious ways were pleasing to God, as Pinnock does.

In fact, Luke notes that once Paul began to speak of the resurrection of Jesus, many of the Athenians scoffed at him and left. But a few people did believe in Paul's words, and these Luke says became believers. Would it not be best, then, to assume that the ones who did not believe in the resurrection did not become followers of Jesus and thus were lost?

Pinnock's last example from Paul's epistles speaks of the resurrection of Jesus. "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). This, Pinnock says, shows that "Jesus recapitulates the purpose of God for humankind and reverses the process which led to our downfall, opening up the way to new life" (34). But again, it would be difficult to find an exclusivist who would not say the very same thing.

Pinnock's last example from the New Testament epistles comes from John's Revelation and the picture of the multitude of believers around the throne, a new heaven, a renewed earth, and the new Jerusalem. God will not be content to "rescue a pathetic remnant" (35; see also 20). God will win a victory over the nations, "not through naked power, but through boundless love" (35). Indeed, John was not a pessimist as many evangelicals apparently are.

This example, however, only concentrates on a limited portion of Revelation. It is difficult to read the entire book and then to only speak of positive things. What of the bowls of wrath, the scrolls, beasts and angels which all portend God's displeasure with humanity? Pinnock speaks of none of this. Of the twenty references Pinnock makes from Revelation throughout *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, only one hints at this negative material in John's oracle.

Fritz Guy attempts a way around this apparent difficulty with Revelation by suggesting that the judgment language of the biblical revelation is "powerful and dramatic symbolic exhortation rather than a scenario of future events" (*Grace & Will*, 44). But then why believe that the biblical language depicting salvation involves an ontological reality, while the judgment language does not? It is because Guy insists that

“any consideration of these realities . . . must always occur within the context of the ultimate reality of divine love. Just as it is the divine love that intends and wills and works for the salvation of as much of humanity as possible – ideally, all of it – so it is the divine love that respects human freedom, even to the extent of allowing humanity to be utterly irrational and perverse – that is, to reject the love that has created, sustained, and redeemed it” (45).

Thus, the original premises which drive inclusivism have resurfaced - the love of God and his respect for human freedom. In other words, there is a controlling factor in all inclusivist reading of Scripture. It is to seek optimism, even when pessimism appears apparent. This “hermeneutic of hopefulness” permeates all of Scripture and must be used to negate any pessimism of a limited scope of salvation. God must not appear “stingy” (*Wideness*, 101), as Calvinistic systems apparently do. Only a soteriological system which expresses an inclusivist understanding of universal atonement and universal access to salvation does justice to the biblical data, especially that data as found in the teaching of Jesus.

2.3 Inclusivism and the Holy Spirit

Pneumatology has played a key theological role in the formulation of Christian doctrine and statements of faith since the Pentecostal movement exploded on the scene in the first decade of the twentieth century. From a missiological point of view, one would not be too far off to label the twentieth century the “Pentecostal Century” in terms of missions and the expansion of its brand of Christianity.⁷⁸ On every continent on the globe, Pentecostalism has rapidly advanced over the last one hundred years. It would stand to reason, then, that any discussion concerning pluralism and inclusivism would involve pneumatological concerns.

Pinnock deals with this important matter in espousing his inclusivism. He notes with approval the numerous statements made by Pope John Paul II concerning the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in non-Christian religions (eg. *Flame*, 198-199). He is also critical of the traditional view, as he sees it, which places the ministry of the Spirit exclusively within the realm of the Church. In fact, in his very definition of the inclusivism he espouses, Pinnock ties it directly to the activity and working of the Spirit:

⁷⁸ During my ordination council in 1993, Jim Reapsome, founding editor of *Pulse Magazine* and the *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, made this point. Clark Pinnock believes that Pentecostalism is “the most important event in modern Christianity” (*Flame*, 18; see also 240).

“Most specifically and crucially, inclusivists believe that the Spirit is everywhere at work in advance of the mission to prepare the way for Jesus Christ” (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 98).

“The Holy Spirit plays a prominent role in my understanding of inclusivism” (106).

Pinnock’s Pneumatology is closely tied to his Soteriology. “The world is the arena of God’s presence, and the Spirit knocks on every human heart, preparing people for the coming of Christ” (*Four Views*, 104). Similarly in *Flame of Love*, “The whole creation is a field of the Spirit’s operation and thus sacramental of God’s presence” (63).

Other inclusivists echo similar sentiments. Sanders explains:

“The unevangelized are indeed “unreached” by human messengers with the word of Christ, but they are not unreached by the Holy Spirit’s ministry of grace” (*No Other Name*, 237).

This can be so because, as professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Grant R. Osborne, says, the Holy Spirit is Jesus’ representative (*Grace & Will*, 252). Therefore, even though Jesus is not explicitly known, nonetheless a person can be saved by him via the work of the Holy Spirit. D. Bruce Lockerbie speaks of such a person responding to “whatever representation of the Holy Spirit they acknowledge.”⁷⁹

Ronald Nash identifies a “pivotal inclusivist argument” when he quotes Pinnock:

“If God really loves the whole world and desires everyone to be saved, it follows logically that everyone must have access to salvation.”⁸⁰

John Sanders provides a more comprehensive explanation:

“If the redemption procured by Jesus objectively provides for the salvation of every human being, and if God intends this salvation to be genuinely universal, then it must be possible for every individual who has ever lived personally to receive that salvation regardless of the historical era, geographic region, or cultural setting in which these people have lived” (*No Other Name*, 216).

This universal access obviously does not come from each and every person having the opportunity to respond to an explicit knowledge of Jesus and his atoning work. Rather, it

⁷⁹ *The Cosmic Center* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1986) 176.

⁸⁰ Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994) 130, quoting Pinnock from *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, 157.

comes because God through his Spirit has “visited every soul of man whom God has made.”⁸¹ As John Sanders notes, “The Spirit opens the door for humans to respond to whatever revelation God has given them” (*No Other Name*, 237).

Therefore, the Holy Spirit plays a pivotal role in the inclusivist understanding of salvation. Considering the fact that roughly half of the world’s population has never heard the gospel, this makes the Spirit’s role all the more vital. This would also vitiate the problem inclusivists see in an exclusivism particularly of the Calvinist type, wherein billions of people have been created with no chance of salvation as unconditional election and limited atonement imply. Such a depiction of God appears grossly unfair and unjust, and simply must be abandoned.

In *Flame of Love*, Pinnock lays out his comprehensive Pneumatology, which is driven by his inclusivist assumptions. It will be helpful to outline his approach, which yields an openness to non-Christian religions which borders on that of pluralism.

After noting in his introduction that far too often the Holy Spirit has been an “afterthought” (10) in Christian theology and liturgy, in chapter 1 Pinnock explains the important role of the Spirit in the Trinity. Pinnock first addresses the obvious question of why he begins here. “I do so because God’s triune identity and the Spirit as the bond of love within it underlie so much else that I want to say” (22). Immediately it is seen the importance that love plays in Pinnock’s theology, a motivation that underpins virtually everything that he has to say in his defence of inclusivism and Open Theism. “The primary fruit of the Spirit [is] love” (37).

This will have particularly important ramifications when analysing Pinnock’s positive view of non-Christian religions. For Pinnock, knowledge of Jesus Christ is not the only means by which people can come to an understanding of the love of God. Via the ministry of the Holy Spirit, this can also happen even when Jesus is not known by name. Pinnock notes with approval the “non-trinitarian” notion, “God is spirit and that when we encounter spirit we encounter God himself” (25).

This is also important given Pinnock’s emphasis on the relationality that exists within the Godhead. Classical theism suffers from too much philosophy, mainly due to Augustine, and not enough reliance on God’s revelation of himself in Scripture.

“Theology always gets into trouble when its practitioners think they know what God is like apart from what revelation says God is like” (33).

⁸¹ John Sanders (*No Other Name*, 237) quoting Edward Pusey from an 1880 work.

“Trinitarian insight into the life of God derives from revelation in history, not from philosophy” (32).

The importance of this observation by Pinnock is to recognise that “God is a triadic community, not a single, undifferentiated unity” (35). Dealing with the classic struggle in attempting to balance unity and person, *ousia* and *hypostases*, Pinnock recognises the error of Modalism in the Trinitarianism of such key theologians as Barth, Rahner, and Küng (33-34). This he says is the result of the reluctance by western theologians to recognise the social trinity (33). Pinnock is much more inclined toward Eastern Orthodoxy’s explanations concerning the Godhead, where he perceives a “degree of dynamic in God” (31).

Pinnock returns to the emphasis on God’s love toward the end of the chapter, and it is here that he begins to move toward an openness outside of the knowledge of Christ that is seen in inclusivism.

“We may find the Spirit’s face also on those outside the church who give a cup of cold water to thirsty ones” (41).

Recalling the previous discussions concerning Pinnock’s view of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, similar sentiments are seen here. The Spirit, who is love as God is love (note the title Pinnock chose for his book, *Flame of Love*), can be seen in loving acts done by any individual. As the Spirit tugs at each human heart to respond in a loving way, a way pleasing to the Father, so it must be expected that acts done in love via the “faith principle” are actually deeds performed via the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Classical theism has erred in its emphasis on an austere and judging God, and this is partly to blame for the existence of atheism (42). Had Western Christianity leaned more toward the social trinity, this would not have necessarily been the case. Pinnock believes that a re-emphasis on the love of God is the key to regaining a proper depiction of his nature. The following quotations illustrate this desire:

“The social Trinity depicts God as beautiful and supremely lovable” (42).

“Theology gains credibility when we have a doctrine of God that one can fall in love with” (43).

“What we see most centrally in God is the shining radiance of love” (44).

“When we render God in this way, not only atheists might come to love him, but even Christians, for we ourselves often lack a sense of God’s beauty and adorableness” (48).

Evangelicals may at first hesitate at the notion that atheism is the result of bad, Christian theology, especially since it appears from Scripture that atheism is the result of people

suppressing the truth (Rom. 1:18-20). However, Pinnock's point is not so much to find the root of atheism, as to spur Christians on to a more loving (and in his estimation more biblical) appreciation of the love of God.

This is because, just as God exists in a loving, social Trinity, so too he seeks loving relationships with his creatures. He seeks a community of believers who will reflect the dynamic love which is the core of his very being.

With this emphasis on love as the primary fruit of the Spirit, and the dynamic relationality within the Godhead, Pinnock is able to move to the next chapter and the Spirit's role in creation. This is the key to his understanding of the Holy Spirit and how people of other faiths can be wooed by God via their non-Christian religions.

“The Spirit is present in all human experience and beyond it. There is no special sacred realm, no sacred-secular split – practically anything in the created order can be sacramental of God's presence” (62).

This is a point which needs careful analysis, because if Pinnock is correct, then the claims of exclusivism, which maintain that faith in Jesus must be professed in order for a person to be saved, can very well be in error. Pinnock approvingly quotes H. I. Lederle in saying that the Spirit is “no ornament of piety” (50, 62).⁸² In other words, evangelicals should not think of the Holy Spirit's role as limited to the Church or to Christianity.

John Sanders makes a similar observation: “Though the church is the recipient of the Spirit and salvation . . . it does not and cannot contain the Spirit and salvation. . . . There is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ, but there is salvation outside the church” (*No Other Name*, 237).

The entire world, in essence, is the Spirit's playground and as such, evangelicals should expect to see the Spirit moving in all areas of creation, both the secular as well as the sacred, “active in natural processes as well as in domains of piety” (66). Other comments from Pinnock relay a similar attitude:

“The power of love is at work everywhere in the world, not just in the churches” (52).

“Let us stop demoting the Spirit, relegating him to spheres of church and piety” (63).

Such insights by Pinnock under-gird his inclusivism, which holds a more open view of those people outside the Church and the reach of missions. The dynamic social Trinity is at

⁸² Lederle is the author of *Treasures Old and New: Interpretations of Spirit-Baptism in the Charismatic Renewal Movement* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988).

work in all corners of the globe, drawing people to God. Pinnock is unhappy with the darker view that historical evangelicalism has had when it comes to areas outside the Church. His view “allows us a broad sympathy for detecting the presence of God everywhere we look and fighting off dark thoughts about God’s absence” (53).

Classical theism has not only erred in its depiction of God in his very nature, but in its depiction of his involvement with his creation as well. Not only is its failure seen in the portrayal of a God less than loving, but also in a God whose providence has predestined all things to their appointed end.

“History is not the playing out of a timelessly fixed decree but a theater where the divine purposes are being worked out by the resourcefulness of God in dealing with the surprises of a significant creation” (56).

As already noted above, the two emphases in inclusivist theology, that of the love of God and his desire to maintain the freewill of humans, should be recognised. God is dynamic, not static as Pinnock feels classical theism teaches. In fact, this dynamic nature can even allow for mistakes to be made by God, but God limits himself in this way so as to allow humans the freedom to choose (what Pinnock later refers to as the “risk of freedom,” 74).

This is because God is motivated supremely by love for his creatures, and rather than force himself upon them (something Pinnock sees in Calvinism’s portrayal of God’s providence and predestination), he would prefer to lovingly draw them to himself.

“From this world the Father longs to hear the very *yes* from the creature that he hears eternally from his beloved Son” (56, emphasis original).

Pinnock’s Pneumatology culminates in an inclusivism that is as far-reaching as it is positive.

“A foundation is laid for universality if indeed the Spirit pervades the world and if no region is closed to his influences” (63).

Evangelicals need not adhere to the dismal thoughts that Augustine once thrust upon the Christian psyche, that there are individuals doomed to eternal punishment in accordance with the predestining decrees of God. God wants, and honestly attempts, to save all people – but never in violation of their own freedom. The Spirit is the guarantee of this universal desire.

Perhaps the best comment by Pinnock in summarising these two important chapters and the role of the Spirit in God’s creation is found in the first chapter:

“God created the world and acts in history to advance the purpose of fostering a community of personal relationships, modeled on the social Trinity, where the gifts of each person are celebrated and nurtured” (45).

The next two chapters of *Flame of Love* build on this foundation. In chapter 3, Pinnock suggests that evangelicals have a “Spirit Christology” which views Christ’s work as part of the Holy Spirit’s work, not vice-versa as has historically been the case in Christian theology. For example, Pinnock sides with Eastern Orthodoxy’s contention that the West’s inclusion of *filioque* into the Nicene Creed not only violated ecclesiastical, ecumenical procedure, but also made the Spirit’s role appear secondary to that of Christ’s (196-197).

To suggest that the role of Jesus is somehow part of the work of the Spirit, and not vice-versa, may appear radical, especially in North American evangelicalism with its emphasis on the gospel proclamation of Jesus as Saviour and Lord. However, the following two quotations give good insight into what Pinnock intends when he makes such a suggestion:

“It was anointing by the Spirit that made Jesus “Christ,” not the hypostatic union, and it was the anointing that made him effective in history as the absolute Savior” (80).

“It was by the Spirit that Jesus was conceived, anointed, empowered, commissioned, directed and raised up” (81-82).

These are important considerations and in fact necessary for Pinnock’s inclusivism. If Jesus and his work are made primary in an understanding of the gospel proclamation, then exclusivism appears to be at least partly correct in its emphasis on personal knowledge of Jesus. But if emphasis is laid more on the work of the Spirit, an inclusivist understanding of universal accessibility to salvation becomes more possible.

Pinnock goes through major areas of the biblical testimony in this regard, especially in the life of Jesus. The virgin birth was via the power of God’s Spirit, which echoes a similar sentiment in the creation narrative of Genesis (86). Jesus began his ministry being baptised by the Spirit (87), and Pinnock contends that this Spirit Christology even makes better sense of the warning against the unforgivable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (89). However, he also is quick to repudiate the accusation that he is resorting to a kind of Adoptionism that was rejected by the early church (91), even while he admits that the term “Spirit Christology” may not be the best term to use and may be misleading (92).

The rest of the chapter is devoted to certain theological implications of this Spirit Christology. Pinnock relates his fondness of Irenaeus’ Recapitulation Theory (93-98), while expressing disapproval with Anselm’s Satisfaction Theory of the atonement (102-111). He

prefers movement away from such an emphasis on propitiation and divine wrath, which appear to make the Father and the Son at odds with each other.⁸³

“It makes grace conditional upon penal satisfaction and gives the impression that the Father actually hates sinners and cannot love them until his wrath is appeased” (107).

He also believes that Anselm’s theory logically leads to limited atonement, “since presumably God does not assault the same person twice” (106). But why does Pinnock take time to attack Anselm’s theory of the atonement in a chapter devoted to Spirit Christology?

The answer is found in the fact that Pinnock prefers to depict the God-human relationship as one of a journey of two partners, not as an appeasing of one by the other. For Anselm, God became human so that the divine wrath could be assuaged. No human could do that, but the God-man could. For Pinnock, God became human so that a new and more dynamic relationship could be developed. Anselm’s view, and any view which lays emphasis on the legal aspect of the atonement, “gives the impression that God values his honor more than he values us” (102).

Pinnock prefers an Eastern Orthodox emphasis – one on death as the primary enemy to be routed by Christ – rather than the Western emphasis on sin. He prefers atonement language which is more subjective than objective, more Christus Victor than Satisfaction. Through the Spirit, Jesus became a human so that a relationship between God and humans caught in the grip of death could be forged. Now, a new situation exists in which each human has the potential of participating in this new life. Just as he sees a Trinitarian emphasis on relationship, so too he expects the same relational emphasis in any talk of the atonement.

The subjective element of Pinnock’s Spirit Christology becomes very clear in the following comments:

“We have only to accept what has been done and allow the Spirit to conform our lives to Christ” (96).

“All humanity has the potential to be the children of God, because all were included in his representation. What remains is for everyone to be reconciled to God personally and subjectively” (100).

“The cross benefits all those who let themselves be linked with his death through baptism” (110).

⁸³ This theme is taken up by the British opponents of penal substitution alluded to earlier (eg., Chalke). They dispute the traditional understanding of penal substitutionary atonement on the basis that it pits the Father against the Son, “the Father as subject, the Son as object.” Pinnock senses a similar problem with the understanding of the atonement found in Anselm’s formulation as propitiation.

Chapter 4 continues earlier themes, namely, that the Spirit is not simply limited to the Church. The point need not be laboured again, but it should be noted that Pinnock sees the same potential problems in Ecclesiology as he did in Christology.

“The danger of subordinating the Spirit to the Son in Christology also exists in ecclesiology. This happens when church is seen as the body of Christ to which the Spirit is added as a helper. The fact is that Christ did not first establish the church and add the Spirit secondarily. The Spirit’s role is not a junior role. As Jesus was conceived by the Spirit in Mary and empowered for mission in baptism, so the church is born and empowered by the Spirit. The Spirit who filled Jesus empowers the community of disciples to be the vehicle of God’s saving activity” (115).

Pinnock continues in the chapter to speak of how the church should more properly be envisioned with this new appreciation for the role of the Spirit, but this does not directly impinge upon the needs of this dissertation.

In the next chapter, Pinnock speaks of salvation as union with God through the Spirit, not necessarily assent to propositional truths or even proclamation or knowledge of Christ. As seen earlier, Pinnock had rightly noted in chapter 2 that if no bifurcation between the sacred and the secular is allowed, “a foundation is laid for universality.” Because this chapter involves *believers* and how the Spirit interacts with them in a non-coercive manner, nothing further needs to be said.

However, there is one comment of note that will inform the understanding of Pinnock’s view of non-Christian religions. Borrowing heavily from the Orthodox understanding of salvation as *theosis*, participation in the energy of God and thus becoming like him, Pinnock makes this interesting comment:

“It may be that when we celebrate union with God as the goal of salvation, we have something in common not only with the Eastern churches but also with non-Christian Eastern religions. There may be more commonality than we thought in this area” (154).

The arguments of the first five chapters culminate in chapter 6, which is a very intriguing chapter indeed. Here Pinnock argues that the tension in Christian theology between particularity and universality can be eased if his view of the Spirit is adopted. The Spirit is universally active in drawing people to God, but it is the particularity of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ which makes reconciliation between God and humans possible.

“Christ, the only mediator, sustains particularity, while Spirit, the presence of God everywhere, safeguards universality” (192).

For Pinnock, this means that the error of exclusivism is actually a worse error than the error of universalism (190-191).

Pinnock made the same basic point earlier when investigating the interplay between Logos Christology and Spirit Christology.

“My point is that Spirit Christology and Logos Christology are complementary, not antithetical. One complements without replacing the other. Logos Christology is ontologically focused, while a Spirit Christology is functionally focused, but the two work together. Generally speaking, Logos addresses the Person of Jesus while Spirit addresses his work” (91).

The interplay between particularity and universality is what Ronald Nash identifies as the “two axioms of inclusivism” (1994:104). Inclusivists refuse to abandon the particularity of Jesus as the only Saviour, as the pluralists do. But they equally refuse to go the way of the exclusivists, at least Calvinistic ones, who apparently abandon the universality of the atonement.

From this vantage point, Pinnock can conclude that explicit knowledge of Jesus and his atoning work is actually not necessary for salvation. Because “no nook or cranny is untouched by the finger of God” (*Flame*, 187), Pinnock can have a more positive view of non-Christian religions than typical evangelicalism has had through the centuries. To bolster his argument, Pinnock appeals to the biblical example of “pagan saints,” various elements in the teaching of Jesus, and the Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace.

Concerning the latter, Pinnock argues the same thing when it comes to grace that he did when speaking of the Spirit.

“We refuse to allow the disjunction between nature and grace or between common and saving grace, on the supposition that, if the triune God is present, grace must be present too” (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 98; see also *Flame*, 199-200).

If the basic assumptions which Pinnock makes concerning the Spirit’s role in creation are true (no sacred/secular split, no common/special grace split), then it would certainly give credence to his inclusivism and his positive view of non-Christian religions.

Concerning a hermeneutic of judgment, questions of exclusivism need to be asked as well. Is the traditional, evangelical view of non-Christian religions as “false” religions deserving of God’s wrath a fair analysis of the biblical data? Is inclusivism’s use of pagan

saints a solid reason for concluding that non-Christian faiths are positively used by God to draw people to himself? It is to these specific matters that this study now turns.

2.4 Inclusivism and non-Christian Religions

Pinnock's Pneumatology leads him to a positive view of non-Christian religions, although how exactly positive he leaves somewhat in question. It was already noted in the Introduction that Pinnock does not agree with Rahner's⁸⁴ overly optimistic view of non-Christian religions as salvific, but how semantic is Pinnock's objection?⁸⁵ Consider the following statements by Pinnock:

"There has been too little openness to the salvific presence of the Spirit in other religions" (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 105).⁸⁶

"There are elements of grace found in other religious traditions, and one hopes they may mediate God's presence for people" (*Flame*, 206).

"The conviction of inclusivism is that the Christian message is the fulfillment, not only of Old Testament religion, but in some way of all religious aspiration and of the human quest itself" (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 115).

"We approach other faiths as possible sources of truth" (*Flame*, 217).

There is a certain confusion in Pinnock's position. On the one hand, he objects to Rahner saying that other faiths are salvific, yet Pinnock bemoans the traditional evangelical position which was not open to the "salvific presence of the Spirit" in other faiths. He claims Christians should recognise elements of grace in non-Christian religions, but just one page over he says that it would be unwise to regard religions as vehicles of grace (*Flame*, 207).

If consideration is given to what has already been discussed about the beliefs of inclusivism, apart from any specific comments made about non-Christian faiths, a general estimation about the attitudes of inclusivists regarding the adherents of other faiths could still be provided.

Inclusivists claim that God's will to save is universal and that he has left no one outside of that plan. Each and every individual has been given enough revelation, albeit in different

⁸⁴ Rahner: "Non-Christian religions must remain . . . legitimate ways of salvation for the majority of the world's people," quoted in Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992) 173. Rahner is not the only Roman Catholic scholar to voice this opinion, but he is the most well-known. For instance, Gavin D'Costa makes similar comments and "affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions," in *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Ltd., 1986) 80.

⁸⁵ Nash notes that Pinnock's brand of inclusivism "tends toward the rosy-eyed optimism" of Rahner (*Jesus Only Savior?* 113).

⁸⁶ What Alan Race calls "signs of the Spirit" (*Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 147).

forms, to positively respond to God. The Holy Spirit is present everywhere and tugs on the heartstrings of each person. God does not want anyone to perish, but has allowed them the freedom to choose, so that salvation is not coercive. People who respond “in faith” to this light, even though they do not know about Jesus, can be saved. These people can be identified because they perform works which are pleasing to the Father, as Jesus taught.

It would not be remiss to conclude, then, that inclusivism would have a very positive view of non-Christian religions. In fact, it would stand to reason that an adherent of Islam, or Buddhism, or even Wicca, could live a morally upright life and positively respond to the Spirit’s prodding. Because many of these people may not know Jesus or have heard the gospel, one could rightly conclude that the “light” they have received has come via their non-Christian faith. Therefore, people can be saved by their non-Christian religion.

But evangelical inclusivists do not go this far. Roman Catholic inclusivists have done so. They have agreed with each tenet as expressed above, and have concluded that non-Christian religions must indeed be salvific.⁸⁷ But evangelical inclusivists have not been willing to make this final leap. The question is, why not?

This is made all the more confusing by Pinnock’s analogy of Israel and the religions of other peoples. He argues that just as God was at work “apart from Jesus Christ but leading up to him” in the nation of Israel, “By analogy with Israel, we watch for anticipations in other faiths to be fulfilled in Christ” (*Flame*, 208). Pinnock’s desire to see no difference between common and special grace, or the secular and the sacred, appears to cause him to minimise the vital role Israel and Old Testament religion played in the coming of the Messiah.

The inclusivist Anglican priest and theologian Alan Race speaks of an inclusivism which “accepts the spiritual power and depth manifest in [other religions], so that they can properly be called a locus of divine presence” (1982:38). Similar comments from other inclusivists echo this sentiment:

“The work of Jesus is ontologically necessary for salvation . . . but not epistemologically necessary (one need not be aware of it in order to benefit from it)” (John Sanders, *No Other Name*, 215).

“*Knowledge* of the Saviour is not a necessary constituent of *being* saved: not, that is, in this life, and not in the sense that historical knowledge about the events of Jesus of Nazareth is required” (Vernon White, *Atonement and Incarnation*, 112, emphasis original).

⁸⁷ Karl Rahner is the prime example of this, as mentioned in the Introduction, n. 37.

Much of inclusivism hangs on whether or not non-Christian religions should be determined to be “false religions.” By this designation for non-Christian faiths, many evangelicals have assumed that all other religions except for Christianity actually turn people away from God and are thus “false.” However, God can use false religions *in some sense* to turn people to Christianity. One of the attractions of Christianity in the early Church during the Roman Empire was its love and graciousness, along with the decency and ethics of those who professed faith in Christ. Many were turned off by the perversion and depravity found in the mystery cults. One could conclude, then, that false religion was used by God to draw people to Christ.

But this does not seem to be the connotation Pinnock and other inclusivists use. Theirs is not a working of the Holy Spirit through the negative aspects of non-Christian religions. Theirs is a positive influence. They seem to be saying that through the noble or good qualities found in their religions, as evidenced by the noble lives of their adherents, the Holy Spirit is using that as a means of drawing people to Christ. Pinnock falls short of calling such a working a “means of grace,” but it is difficult to see why he would balk at such a definition.

Inclusivist Gerald McDermott, associate professor of religion and philosophy at Roanoke College in Virginia, attempts a way around this apparent dilemma. He states:

“I claim that there is revelation of a sort in at least some of the religions – neither general nor special revelation but ‘revealed types.’”⁸⁸

This appears to be an attempt by an inclusivist to grant non-Christian religions a better status than the typical “false” category evangelicals have thrown them into, while at the same time not allowing them an equal status with Christianity. McDermott spends an entire chapter showing how Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin “used thinking from outside the church to help them understand the revelation of Christ” (2000:15).

McDermott contends that Christians can actually learn more about Christ by reflecting on other religions (16).

“Perhaps evangelicals may be able to learn from the Buddha – and other great religious thinkers and traditions – things that can help them more clearly understand God’s revelation in Christ” (12).

This is certainly going further than many evangelicals would be willing to go. If the assumption among evangelicals is, as Paul says, that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of

⁸⁸ *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? Jesus, Revelation & Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000) 13.

wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3), then why would Christians need to consult non-Christian religions to learn more about Christ?

McDermott uses the typical inclusivist arguments, such as pagan saints, to bolster his point, and he agrees with Pinnock’s analogy seen above concerning Israel when he concludes:

“We can infer that if there were different expectations from Old Testament saints under a different dispensation with different degrees of revelation, we should not dismiss other religions as completely lacking revelation merely because they make different requirements of their adherents” (102).

But his brand of inclusivism apparently is willing to go a bit further than other inclusivists to this date have attempted to go. Whereas inclusivists are generally agreed that there are elements of truth found in non-Christian religions that can lead people to God, McDermott looks at the matter from the opposite direction. If there are truths in other religions, then Christians can learn from these as well.

In endorsing this book, Pinnock congratulates McDermott on his “gracious and open spirit” (back cover). However, as with virtually every other evangelical inclusivist, McDermott is not willing to grant that non-Christian religions have a salvific content to their revelation, even though he believes the following:

“My claim is that among the religions are scattered promises of God in Christ and that these promises are revealed types planted there by the triune God” (114).

McDermott is unwilling to categorically and clearly state what happens to adherents of these religions who never hear the gospel. In fact, he takes an agnostic view (213). Albeit, his book is not specifically meant to address this issue. Still, McDermott appears to be another example of an evangelical inclusivist who wants to grant a certain revelatory content to non-Christian faiths, yet is not willing to grant salvation for adherents of those same religions.

Pinnock asks the important question, “What is the status of other religions, according to inclusivism?” (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 116). Unfortunately, he fails to answer the question directly. Pinnock’s argument amounts to “God can do what he chooses to do,” or, “The Spirit breathes where he chooses to breathe,” but Pinnock otherwise provides no solid answer to this question. This fuzziness concerning non-Christian religions is perhaps the most disappointing aspect of evangelical inclusivism, despite the fact that inclusivists have

had over twenty years to properly and clearly develop it.⁸⁹ His argument stems more from a logic which runs as such: Because religion is part of human culture, and because human culture is part of creation, and because creation is under the realm of God, God can use religion to draw people to himself.

Pinnock quotes C. S. Lewis positively when Lewis makes this conclusion: “There are people in other religions who are being led by God’s secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it.”⁹⁰ Pinnock then provides his own, similar belief:

“All the paths that lead to God end up with Jesus, but they do not all start with him.”⁹¹ Such a statement is difficult to argue with, because it sounds so reasonable. And the countless examples of people who started in non-Christian religions, but ultimately were led to faith in Christ, seem to stand in support of such a statement.

From a traditional evangelical viewpoint, there are two broad options when one is considering non-Christian religions. Either they are false, or they are not.⁹² What would be helpful is to see Pinnock answer the straightforward question, “If a Muslim dies in sincere faith in Mohammed and his teachings, will he go to heaven?” He comes close to answering this question but then leaves it for God to decide, a most unsatisfactory answer when that is precisely what evangelicals are attempting to determine (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 120).

Pinnock seems to always cling to the notion that non-Christian religions are preparing people for Christ, but what if the message of Christ never comes?⁹³ In *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, Pinnock speaks positively of “post-mortem encounter,” the notion that people have a chance to profess faith in Jesus after they die (168-175). This is perhaps understandable,

⁸⁹ At least Catholic inclusivism is much clearer on this point.

⁹⁰ C.S. Lewis is quoted here from *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1969) 176.

⁹¹ Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 119; see *Flame*, 204-205, for similar sentiments.

⁹² A third option is the notion that there are some good things in all religions and if people only concentrate on those, their religion can be a positive influence. This is basically what Lewis is saying in the quotation above. However, what elements of these non-Christian religions can Lewis be thinking about, when as a whole such religions would deny the Christian understanding of the person and work of Christ, how a person is saved, and even the nature of God and his existence? It seems difficult if not impossible to accept the notion that people “belong to Christ” when they at best know nothing about him, and at worse profess things entirely contrary to the truth about Jesus and his Father.

⁹³ Pinnock cites missionary and missiologist Don Richardson and the “redemptive analogies” or “bridges” he speaks about in his writings and missionary experience, but again this begs the question. What would have happened to those people had the gospel never in actuality come to them? (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 109 and 111, and *Wideness*, 99. See also *Flame*, 204 and 208).

since he is not willing to really commit himself either way on what happens to a person who dies professing the tenets of a non-Christian faith.⁹⁴

Pinnock makes this interesting comment: “Witchcraft and Nazism are not valid responses to the divine, according to the gospel” (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 113). What, then, would he say about Islam, or Hinduism, or Buddhism? Is a religion which denies the deity of Jesus a “valid response to the divine?” How about a religion which teaches polytheism, or which denies the personality of God?⁹⁵ Are such religions “valid responses?”⁹⁶

In *Wideness*, Pinnock makes some fuller statements about other religions. He notes two basic criteria for recognising a holy pagan: Does he fear God, and does he pursue righteousness? For the first matter, Pinnock argues as follows:

“Some intend the same reality Christians intend when they believe in God (as personal, good, knowing, kind, strong, etc.). But others do not. When Jews and Muslims, for example, praise God as the Creator of the world, it is obvious that they are referring to the same Being. There are not two almighty creators of heaven and earth, but only one. We may assume that they are intending to worship the one Creator God that we also serve. The same rule would apply to Africans who recognize a high God, a God who sees all, gives gifts to all, who is unchangeable and wise” (96-97).

Pinnock goes further to add that the “fear of God” criterion does not apply to a Zen master “who attempts to place the void over against a theistic belief” (*Wideness*, 97). He says this because the Zen void cannot be equated with the Christian God, but this unfortunately leaves more questions unanswered. Can the God of Islam truly be equated with the God of Christianity, when Islam denies the Trinity? If the only criterion is whether or not a person believes in a Creator, then why spend any time talking about the revelation of the Son of God? To “fear God,” at least in the biblical usage of this phrase, entails far more than a simple belief in a Creator Being. The example of the pagan saint Cornelius investigated later will help in clarifying some of these issues.

⁹⁴ Pinnock even goes so far as to say he is really unsure what happens to people who, “when presented with the gospel, still choose to remain within their own faith” (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 120).

⁹⁵ Exclusivist Bruce Demarest briefly investigates this matter in his concluding comments in *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), by showing how Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism contradict the gospel at key points, and cannot properly be considered as valid responses to God (255-259).

⁹⁶ Besides, there are many morally upright people who practice witchcraft. The general tenet of Wicca, for example, that ‘whatever you do to others will come back upon you threefold’ guards many of them against performing anything evil on others. The “noble pagan” designation can indeed apply to people who practice witchcraft. And as heinous as Nazism was, people cannot argue against the fact that many Nazis cared for their families and lived otherwise upright, acceptable lives despite their Nazism. It seems Pinnock chooses these two examples of false religions to bolster his point, but it fails to work.

Pinnock's second criterion, that of pursuing righteousness, appears to boil down to a works-righteousness theology. His positive usage of the Roman Catholic pronouncement on this score only serves to prove this point (eg., *Flame*, 198-199). The well-known statement by Vatican II that even atheists can, based on their ethical behaviour, have a right relationship with God, even though they deny his existence, is tantamount to saying the same sort of thing Lewis said about Christ. So long as a person performs good works, that person can "belong to Christ" even though there is no knowledge of Christ. The same evidently can happen with an atheist. Even though atheists deny the very existence of God, as long as they are good and upright people, they can belong to God, while denying his very existence. This is precisely what Pinnock claims (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 118-119).⁹⁷

This comment by Pinnock was noted earlier when discussing inclusivism and its usage of the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. It has specific importance for consideration now concerning non-Christian religions.

"Those who confess Christ and those who do not are judged alike by the extent to which they walk in the way of the Son of Man" (*Wideness*, 165).

But how can people who have never heard of Jesus "walk in the way of the Son of Man?" One must assume that they learn this "way" via their non-Christian religion. This being the case, it is difficult to see why evangelical inclusivists are unwilling to consider such religions as salvific.

The above is a logical outflow of inclusivism's position concerning explicit knowledge of Christ. If people can be saved without knowledge of Jesus, what is left for a basis upon which they can be saved except that it comes via their good works?

Pinnock crowns his statements in this section on other religions with this comment:

"What the Bible tells us about other faiths being sometimes noble and truthful is confirmed in experience as well" (*Wideness*, 99).

He makes it clear that he disagrees with the historical evangelical position concerning non-Christian faiths:

"We should reject the hyper-Protestant position on other religions that claims the divine action in Jesus Christ is the only divine action and the only revelation, and that religion is nothing but useless human activity" (*Wideness*, 107).

⁹⁷ Clendenin makes a similar point: "Vatican II (1962-65) went even further, declaring that people of other religions and even atheists of no religion at all who live up to their consciences can be saved" (*Many Gods, Many Lords*, 30).

The main argument used by inclusivists to support such a conclusion is the biblical category of “holy pagans” such as Noah, Job, Melchizedek, and others who neither had knowledge of Jesus Christ nor were part of the nation of Israel.

“Even faith-responses can be made in the context of other religion as in the case of Melchizedek and Jethro (both pagan priests). Their religions seem to have been vehicles of salvation for them” (*Wideness*, 107).

It is to this category that attention is now given.

2.5 Inclusivism and “Pagan Saints”

It was noted in the previous section that Pinnock lays out a solid argument in *Flame of Love* for why he believes that evangelicals should look more favourably upon non-Christian religions than they have traditionally done. This position rests in large part on Pinnock’s biblical proof concerning “pagan saints.”

“Bewitched by the alien doctrine of double predestination . . . we have ignored the tradition of holy pagans” (*Wideness*, 30).

If it can be shown that his argument is not sound in this area, his entire inclusivist garment could begin to unravel. Conversely, if his reasoning is solid, it would go a long way to proving inclusivism as biblically faithful.

Inclusivists go to great pains to show from Scripture how God has cared for those people traditionally defined as outside his “chosen people.” The usual conclusion is that God uses the pagan religions of these pagan people to draw them to himself. From Pinnock’s works, special attention will be given to Job, Melchizedek, Abimelech, and Cornelius.⁹⁸ However, comments from other inclusivists will be included where appropriate.

Job. Pinnock refers to Job as “. . . a pagan believer . . . who had a good will and put his trust in God even though inadequately informed doctrinally and morally.” Pinnock goes on to use Job as a model for “holy pagans” at any point in history, but especially for today.

“A person who is informationally premessianic, whether living in ancient or modern times, is in the exact same spiritual situation” (*Wideness*, 160).⁹⁹

⁹⁸ In *Wideness* (92), Pinnock gives a more exhaustive list of the people he considers to be pagan saints or holy pagans. Among these people he lists Daniel, which is most confusing, as Daniel is clearly labelled an Israelite in the opening verses of the biblical book which bears his name.

⁹⁹ Pinnock also inserts his pagan saints position at various points in his argumentation in *Flame* (eg., 82, 198, 203).

Clendenin notes that Gregory the Great considered Job “a just pagan” (1995:53), and McDermott provides this extensive comment in a footnote about Augustine’s view concerning Job:

“Augustine tended to exclude pagans from the church, but he left the door open at points. In *The City of God*, for example, he wrote that the story of Job, who was not a Jew, teaches us that ‘it was divinely provided, that from this one case we might know that among other nations also there might be men pertaining to the spiritual Jerusalem who have lived according to God and have pleased Him’” (2000:96).

Clendenin uses Job several times through *Many Gods, Many Lords*, arguing that the biblical data showing God’s interest in pagan saints should not be limited just to individuals, but even to entire pagan nations (134-135). He also points out that the prophet Ezekiel (14:14,20) uses Job, Noah, and Daniel as examples of “the most distinguished saints in all of Hebrew history,” even though they all lived in the context of pagan cultures (123). His final use of Job connects Job’s desire to help the poor and needy with the teaching we already found in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats. In essence, Job meets the “eschatological standard by which all people will be judged” (138).

John Sanders includes Job in his list of pagan saints, and he names such varied personages as Balaam, the Queen of Sheba, and Naaman in his list (*No Other Name*, 219-220). All of these are Gentiles to whom God showed favour, even though they did not exist within the covenant God had with Israel. According to inclusivists, they are important biblical indicators that God will continue to show favour to people today who are not involved in the gospel covenant.

Melchizedek. Much is made by inclusivists about Melchizedek. Pinnock says,

“The story of his [Melchizedek’s] encounter with Abram shows that God was at work in the religious sphere of Canaanite culture” (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 109; see also *Flame*, 203).

Pinnock states that two things should be learned from the encounter between Abram and Melchizedek: 1) there are believers in other nations, and 2) there are positive contributions to be appreciated from Canaanite religion and culture.

“I think that the compiler of Genesis wants to tell us that, though Abram had a special calling from the Lord, he is not to think (and we are not to think) that there are no other believers among the nations and no positive contributions to be appreciated from non-Israelite religion and culture” (*Wideness*, 26).

Another inclusivist, missiologist Don Richardson, pins a great deal on the mysterious figure of Melchizedek, to the point of even labelling this phenomenon as the “Melchizedek factor.” Richardson states that Melchizedek “worships the same God as Abraham (14:19) – and this evidently without any special revelation from God.”¹⁰⁰ It seems that for Richardson, Melchizedek serves as the quintessential example of a pagan coming to faith in the one, true God via means which are not properly labelled as “special revelation.”¹⁰¹

Similarly, Clendenin notes that “Yahweh was clearly at work in the lives of some pagan people” and he immediately cites the “pagan priest” Melchizedek (1995:133). McDermott states that Melchizedek had true knowledge of God “apart from revelation given through the Abrahamic lineage” and worshipped God “under the name of a Canaanite deity” (2000:78).

He further notes that when Abram pays the tithe to Melchizedek, he utters the words, “I have sworn to the LORD [Yahweh], God Most High [El Elyon],” conjoining both the designation for God from the Hebrew tradition as well as that from Melchizedek’s pagan culture. This, McDermott contends, is powerful proof that Abram “acknowledged the legitimacy of Melchizedek’s priesthood and sanctuary” (2000:78).

A similar sentiment is expressed by Sanders when he notes:

“Melchizedek is elevated above Abraham in the Genesis narrative and becomes in later biblical history the model of the ideal priesthood (Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:17)” (*No Other Name*, 219).

He also cites another pagan priest who played a prominent role in the early history of the Israelite nation, noting that, “Remarkably, Scripture ascribes the establishment of Israel’s judiciary system to Moses’ father-in-law, the pagan priest Jethro” (219).

Abimelech. Pinnock writes that the example of Abimelech “proves beyond any doubt that the fear of the Lord may occur in the hearts of people who live far beyond Israel’s Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 98” (*Wideness*, 94). This again is used as an example by Pinnock because he assumes that Abimelech did not possess special revelation from God such as that possessed by Abraham. Similarly, Clendenin notes that the great patriarch Abraham was rebuked by Abimelech (53), and that this pagan king received visions from the Lord (133).

¹⁰⁰ See *Eternity in Their Hearts* (New York: Regal Books, 1981). Sanders cites this quotation in *Three Views*, 44.

¹⁰¹ Richardson was a missionary to Papua New Guinea for several years and is best known for his books *Eternity in Their Hearts*, *Peace Child* (New York: Regal Books, 1974), and *Lords of the Earth* (Minneapolis, MN: Gospel Light Publications, 1979).

Pinnock is fearful that exclusivist thinking blinds Christians to the truth that God is at work outside the confines of the church (*Four Views*, 254). In this way, then, exclusivists are very much like Abraham in his encounter with Abimelech. Yet, Abraham later discovered that “the fear of God was indeed in the man’s house” (111). In fact, Abimelech acted more like a believer than did the patriarch.

“There is testimony in human experience that God is redemptively at work in other religious communities, which confirms what inclusivists expect” (111).

Cornelius. The last example comes from the New Testament, the episode involving Cornelius. This incident seems to be most used by inclusivists, perhaps because it comes from the New Testament and involves a post-resurrection personage. Pinnock calls this encounter “important evidence of the salvation of the unevangelized” and an example “par excellence” of a pagan saint (*Wideness*, 165).¹⁰²

What would have happened to someone like Cornelius had he not heard the gospel? Pinnock addresses this matter by stating that he would have been saved. Cornelius “was a believer already and not hellbound” (166).

“Those like Cornelius, who have responded to God in pagan contexts will need to turn to Christ to receive what Jesus alone can give them: the Holy Spirit, a portion in the kingdom of God, and the experience of messianic salvation” (179).

Similarly, people like Job and Melchizedek do not need deliverance from “eschatological wrath” but rather need “access to the fuller expression of God’s grace and power, which is in Jesus” (179).

Echoing the sentiments of Pinnock, John Sanders makes this comment after his discussion of Cornelius, as well as the Athenians as recounted in Acts 17:

“Peter and Paul came to the realization that there were Gentiles who worshiped the true God despite the fact that some of them had limited knowledge of the Old Testament while others remained completely without special revelation” (*Three Views*, 43).

He makes an even bolder statement: “Cornelius was already a saved believer *before* Peter arrived, but he was now a Christian believer.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² It is this encounter with Cornelius that Pinnock has used to formulate his two basic criteria for how to recognise a holy pagan, as noted in the previous section, “Inclusivism and non-Christian Religions.”

¹⁰³ “Is Belief in Christ Necessary for Salvation?” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 60 (1988) 254.

Clendenin sees importance in the fact that “long before he heard the gospel, Cornelius was a devout and God-fearing person who prayed to God regularly and gave generously to people in need” (1995:81). That God heard his prayers and responded (53, 81) is further proof that pagans who come faithfully to God will not be turned away. Similarly, McDermott notes that the apostle Peter learned something of religious importance from the pagan Cornelius. Even before Cornelius heard the gospel from Peter, he had received some revelation from God, while “still in his pre-Christian state” (2000:89). “A Christian (Peter) was learning religious truth from someone who had not yet received the gospel” (89). Just as Jesus had used pagans as examples to teach his would-be disciples about faith, so too Peter learned from Cornelius.

The biblical example of pagan saints is the quintessential inclusivist argument for hopefulness when considering the unevangelised. However, when coupled with their positive statements concerning non-Christian religions in general, it is again confusing as to why they fail to go completely the way of Catholic inclusivists. If people like Job, Melchizedek, and Cornelius were saved in their pagan contexts, apart from any knowledge of Jesus or membership in the chosen nation and her covenant with Yahweh, then why not conclude that non-Christian religions are salvific?

It is mainly from the model of pagan saints found in Scripture that inclusivism builds its Pneumatology into a positive portrayal of non-Christian faiths. This positive portrayal is also supported by the inclusivist understanding of general revelation.

2.6 Inclusivism and General Revelation

Christian scholars have traditionally made a distinction between two kinds of revelation, general and special (see *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* for this broad distinction). General revelation is that information which reveals something about God in a general, or broad manner which is equally accessible to all humans. Special revelation is that information which reveals something specially known about God, not inherently accessible to all humans. Because it is not innately known, it must be specially revealed. From Christian doctrines, the existence of God as evidenced through his creation is a classic representation of general revelation, while knowing that the Bible is God’s Word, or that Jesus died for the sins of humanity, needs to be specially revealed in order to be known.

A simple example to clarify may help. Consider a person’s skin colour. To anyone who looks at that person, it is generally known what his or her skin colour is. However, what is

that person's favourite food or drink? That is not self-evident but is a fact which must be specially revealed in order to be known.

The same concerns God and his will. Some characteristics or attributes of God are known through what he has made, and as nature is accessible to all humans, so too is this knowledge about God generally known. But with other matters, such as how to live a life pleasing to God, this must be specially revealed.

Although this broad distinction has been generally recognised as valid, the problem rests mainly in whether or not the content of general revelation is adequate to save a person. There has been heated debate for centuries on how precisely to answer this question.¹⁰⁴

As already noted, in some ways inclusivists have taken positions which are more akin to Catholic understandings than evangelical, and this is similar in the case of general revelation. Traditionally, evangelicals have tended toward a negative answer to the question, "Is the content of general revelation sufficient for salvation?" Whereas, Catholic theology has opted for a more positive view, culminating in the sweeping conclusions of Vatican II.

Bruce Demarest, professor of Systematic Theology at Denver Seminary, notes, "Roman Catholicism's current position on the issues of the knowability of God and the validity of the non-Christian religions represents a marked if not a radical shift from traditional perspectives and commitments" (1982:181). In short, through Vatican II Catholicism proclaimed that salvific knowledge of God through all avenues of revelation, both general and specific, is possible for all humanity. This is evidenced in its positive proclamations concerning non-Christian religions and even moral atheists.¹⁰⁵

Inclusivist scholars have taken up that lead, and Pinnock for example is quite happy to quote the Vatican II conclusions in support of some of his claims.

"I make no apology as an evangelical in admitting an enormous debt of gratitude to the Council for its guidance on this topic" (*Four Views*, 97, n.4).

He notes elsewhere: "We cannot see how any revelation from the God of the gospel can be other than saving in its basic significance if it is truly a revelation of God" (*Scripture Principle*, 31). Yet he blunts this assertion by noting that general revelation "remains rather

¹⁰⁴ For a brief yet thorough historical review of this debate, from the Reformation to the present, see Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979) 75-77. For something much more comprehensive in scope, see Bruce Demarest, *General Revelation*.

¹⁰⁵ The entire corpus of Vatican II documents is conveniently provided in Walter M. Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966). Demarest recognises a radical shift in Catholic theology to one which more resembles liberal Protestantism in the end: "Vatican II thus moves in the direction of liberal Protestantism" (185) and "Liberal Protestantism scarcely could have written a script more in tune with the accommodating mood of the modern world" (188).

hidden, is relatively unclear, calls for further revelation that is more definitive and out in the open (31-32).

John Sanders also notes how important general revelation is to the inclusivist argument. After a discussion concerning “believers” who do not hear about Jesus (versus “Christians” who do), he turns to a second theological argument “put forth in support of inclusivism,” namely that, “God uses general revelation to mediate his salvific grace” (*No Other Name*, 233). Contra the typical evangelical view that general revelation is only good enough to condemn sinners, but not good enough to save them, Sanders quotes inclusivist Dale Moody:

“It is possible to say that this general revelation of God has only a negative function that leaves man without excuse. . . . But what kind of God is he who gives man enough knowledge to damn him but not enough to save him? The perception of God in creation has both negative and positive possibilities” (233).¹⁰⁶

One somewhat radical shift that Catholicism made which inclusivists pick up is to include the religious sphere of humanity in the category of general revelation. As some critical to Vatican II Catholicism have noted, this appears a far cry from Cyprian’s classic proclamation, “Outside the Church there is no salvation.” Similarly, many evangelicals would take issue with inclusivism’s more positive portrayal of non-Christian religions, as already noted above.

But is religion rightly considered an aspect of God’s general revelation? Inclusivists answer a resounding yes. Some examples from Pinnock should suffice:

“We have neglected the salvific presence of the Spirit in humanity’s search for meaning generally” (*Four Views*, 105).

“Why would God, who is present everywhere, absent himself so totally from the sphere of religion, the very realm in which people search for ultimate answers?” (*Wideness*, 79).

“Religion is a central part of human culture and embodies the human search for meaning” (*Four Views*, 116).

An intimate connection is made between the general work of God’s Spirit in the world, prevenient grace from God to move humanity toward God, and humanity’s quest for God via religion and culture.

Prevenient grace is defined by Pinnock as the “universal, gracious operations of the Spirit” (*Flame*, 199). This grace becomes a means by which God draws people to himself,

¹⁰⁶ Moody is quoted from *The Word of Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981) 61.

even those people who never hear the gospel. In support of this understanding of prevenient grace, Pinnock uses both John Wesley and Karl Rahner as examples.

John Sanders recognises this same kind of grace, although he fails to use the term “prevenient” to refer to it. Still, he notes that in inclusivism there exists a grace which knocks on every human heart, and this grace comes via the work of the Holy Spirit (*No Other Name*, 236-238).

Pinnock also notes that prevenient grace overcomes the sinfulness of humans and gives them the ability to seek God, a doctrine of grace which is very Wesleyan.

“Apart from divine grace sinners do not have the inclination to seek God, but under the influence of prevenient grace they may choose to do so” (*Wideness*, 103).

To say, as traditional evangelicalism has said, that non-Christian religions are “false” and do not bring their adherents closer to God, appears to inclusivists to wrongly neglect prevenient grace and the benefits of general revelation.

“The Spirit embodies the prevenient grace of God and puts into effect that universal drawing action of Jesus Christ” (*Four Views*, 104).

“Religions provide a window of opportunity for the Spirit to engage people, because . . . God is also mysteriously present and working” (*Four Views*, 116).

“Revelation is embodied in other religions” (*Four Views*, 118).

The example of pagan saints is used primarily to support the claim that God’s Spirit is working through non-Christian religions to draw people to himself.

“God is drawing the nations, and religions supply occasions when people can respond to him” (*Flame*, 201).

In endnote 32 from chapter 6, Pinnock also notes his disapproval of the contention that non-Christians cannot possess the Holy Spirit, again noting a pagan saint, Cornelius, as his main reason for disagreement.

Two more statements from separate works of Pinnock will show what role prevenient grace plays in his theology.

“Because of Spirit, everyone has the possibility of encountering him – even those who have not heard of Christ may establish a relationship with God through prevenient grace” (*Flame*, 199).

“World religions reflect to some degree general revelation and prevenient grace” (*Wideness*, 104).

To the typical evangelical response that non-Christians are not saved via general revelation, John Sanders uses the argument that just because salvation is in Jesus Christ, this does not mean that it also is not elsewhere.¹⁰⁷ Inclusivists prefer to say that Scripture is silent on the issue of the fate of the unevangelised, rather than to make negative conclusions based on Scripture's silence, as they see exclusivists doing.

Pinnock makes more thorough replies to this objection. He notes that God is the God of both general and special revelation, and it would be absurd to think that he would provide only one for salvation, while the other can only damn sinners (*Wideness*, 104).¹⁰⁸ To the objection that sinners cannot positively respond to general revelation anyway, Pinnock again falls back on his view of pagan saints. Because pagan saints obviously responded positively to general revelation, evangelicals cannot conclude that people today cannot do likewise (105). In essence, general revelation not only can save, but it does save.

Lastly, Pinnock sees the positive benefits in the world's religions because humankind is made in the image of God. Because the image is present, humans naturally seek God.

"It is our nature, made in the image of God, to seek him" (*Wideness*, 102).

This can "explain the existence of truth and nobility that sometimes is found in other religions" (102). In short, because of the image of God in humans,

"All persons know God precognitively, and most acknowledge him cognitively as well" (102).

For the above reasons, inclusivists view general revelation in a highly positive light. Its purpose is to draw people to God, and the image of God in all humans drives them to seek him. Because God wants all people to have a saving knowledge of himself, he does not limit this saving knowledge only to the content of special revelation.

2.7 Inclusivism and Classical Theism

Who is God, and what is he really like? The answer to this question is at the heart of inclusivism. The typical evangelical response to this question, what Pinnock often refers to as "classical theism," is an answer not comfortable with the Soteriology of inclusivism.

In answer to the above question, Pinnock asks a counter question:

¹⁰⁷ "Is Belief in Christ Necessary for Salvation?", 246. See also Pinnock, "Acts 4:12 – No Other Name Under Heaven," *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard*, Crockett and Sigountos, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991) 107-115, where he also argues that just because profession of faith in Christ is effective for salvation, this does not mean it is the *only* means of salvation. See also *Wideness*, 101-102.

¹⁰⁸ Pinnock quotes Moody to bolster his point further: "What kind of a God is he who gives man enough knowledge to damn him but not enough to save him?" (*Wideness*, 104).

“Is he the kind of God who would be capable of sitting by while large numbers perish, or the kind to seek them out patiently and tirelessly” (*Wideness*, 18).

Obviously, Pinnock opts for the latter. Contra exclusivism, Pinnock pictures a God who “does not want only to rescue a few brands plucked from the burning” (23). It is from the profound commitment to inclusivism that Pinnock and others have adopted a new theism commonly known as Open Theism.

By his own admission, Pinnock sees the theological views of Open Theism as “radical.” Open Theism takes traditional Arminianism and “calls for a more radical modification of the [traditional view of God]” (*Most Moved Mover*, 13). Doctrines such as God’s eternity, immutability, and omniscience have all been dramatically altered by open theists. At the heart of these changes lay a Soteriology deeply committed to a “wider hope” than traditionally attributed to evangelicalism. In other words, changes in the Theology of inclusivism have become necessary in order to support its Soteriology.

As fascinating as these changes are, most of them are outside the scope of this dissertation. To be sure, if God’s omniscience is “limited” in the sense that open theists claim it is, then that would certainly affect the coming judgment. Further, if God can change and is subject to the temporal, then one would rightly question his ability to enact the final judgment that he promises. One area of Theology cannot be changed, then, without having effects on other areas. Therefore, some comments will be necessary, but a deep, thorough analysis of each point of Open Theism is not needed here.

Clark Pinnock is open to change in evangelical theology. In fact, he says that evangelicals *must* be open to it if they want to remain relevant theologians today (*Most Moved Mover*, ix, 1). He is even so bold as to proclaim that it is the traditional evangelicals, the ones who maintain the immutability and eternity of God, which are the “liberals” in evangelicalism (67). On the surface this is a rather shocking statement, but what Pinnock aims to point out is that traditional evangelicals have adopted a theism which is more influenced by Greek philosophy than the Bible (see his section in *Most Moved Mover*, “Overcoming a Pagan Inheritance,” 65-111).

Pinnock sees much of the dark side of evangelical theology as the fault of Augustine, cataloguing a fair amount of his errors (*Wideness*, 37-40). It is from Augustine that a “package of dismal beliefs” and “harsh notions” (39) was born including, “soteriological predestination, total depravity, everlasting conscious torment in hell, strict limitations on who can be saved, forbiddingly high ecclesiastical walls, the importance of living within the jurisdiction of the Catholic church, and pessimism for anyone living beyond its borders”

(39).¹⁰⁹ He goes on to further castigate Protestant reformers like Calvin and Luther who propagated many of the errors of Augustine (40).¹¹⁰

In order to maintain a wider hope of salvation for the unevangelised, without falling into the errors of pluralism and its abandonment of Christ as the focus of redemption, inclusivists have had to alter classical, evangelical theism. This has occurred in three main areas or attributes of God: immutability, eternity, and omniscience.

Pinnock's main argument is that classical theism has suffered from too much philosophical influence and not enough biblical reliance. When he asks, "What do we get when we subtract the pagan influences?" his answer is Open Theism's model (*Most Moved Mover*, 79).

In order to understand the full shock that has hit American evangelicalism with the rise of Open Theism, a few select quotations from prominent proponents of this position are provided here.

"The possibility remains that God could be mistaken" (Sanders, *Risks*, 228).

"God does not exercise meticulous providence in such a way that the success of his project is a foregone conclusion" (*Risks*, 35).

"The God of the Bible is relational and changeable in his interaction with his creatures" (Pinnock, *Grace/Will*, 24).

"Instead of perceiving the entire course of human existence in one timeless moment, God comes to know events as they take place. He learns something from what transpires" (Richard Rice, *Openness*, 16).

This is indeed a radical departure even from traditional Arminian theism, as Pinnock recognises (*Most Moved Mover*, 106-111). But in order for open theists to maintain God's relationality with his creation, they feel that they must alter the traditional views of God's unchangeableness, his timelessness, and his ability to know the future.

As noted above, it is often either stated or implied by supporters of Open Theism that God respects the freewill he has given to his creatures and will not violate it. In fact, it is upon the basis of this general presupposition that open theists posit that God cannot know the future choices of free-willed beings. Normally the argument is put forward that if God did know those choices in advance of them being performed, this would negate any freedom that the

¹⁰⁹ Pinnock further notes that "this very harshness more than anything else propogates [sic] radical pluralism" (*Wideness*, 41).

¹¹⁰ Many evangelicals share most of the items in this list from Augustine, except obviously the one concerning the Catholic church. However, it is clear from inclusivists that the Calvinist variety of evangelicalism embodies virtually all of these "harsh" teachings, as opposed to evangelicals with more Arminian leanings.

creature has to act.¹¹¹ Future choices already known by God preclude freedom by the creature to make those choices, so say the open theists, and result in a “theological fatalism.”

Further, if God is unchanging, then he cannot properly or fully relate to beings who are subject to change. And if God is timeless, he is also unable to relate to or interact with finite, time-bound creatures.

Open theists compensate for these apparent deficiencies by referring to God in other ways. Gregory Boyd (*Satan and the Problem of Evil*) covers this problem by labelling God “omni-resourceful” and “omni-competent.” In other words, God is able to make sure promises despite his inability to exactly know the future. For example, God’s ability to guarantee that Christ will have a bride is based on God’s 1) infinite ability to predict human behaviour, which would lead him to believe that at least some humans would positively respond to his loving offer of relationship, and 2) because he would not give up until some humans have done so (155-158).

“God is determined . . . there would be a bride, and he will not give up until this goal is achieved” (158).

Inclusivists see God’s ability to accurately guess the future in examples such as his promise to build Abraham’s seed into a great nation, and the predictions by Jesus concerning Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denial (Sanders, *Risks*, 167-168). However, despite his high degree of accuracy, God still can be wrong in his predictions.

Pinnock believes that God is “voluntarily self-limited” and “takes risks,” yet via the “power of persuasion” can still ensure that his plan of salvation comes to pass (*Openness*, 115-117). And yet, “The biblical narrative plainly reveals that God has rivals and has to struggle with them” (114). Further,

“The fall into sin was against the will of God and proves by itself that God does not exercise total control over all events in this world” (115).

William Hasker also speaks of God’s persuasive power such that he wins via love and not coercion (*Openness*, 142).

When attention later is turned to critically look at these tenets of Open Theism, only an eye as to how they affect a hermeneutic of judgment will be given, despite the fact that other, equally fascinating discussions can take place concerning them. The issue of God’s immutability, for example, will have much greater impact on the aim of this dissertation than will the issues of his eternity and his omniscience.

¹¹¹ For example, see William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in *The Openness of God*, 147-150.

2.8 Inclusivism and Scripture

The development of any full-blown doctrine of Scripture has not normally been a major thrust of inclusivism or Open Theism.¹¹² This stems mainly from the fact that inclusivists such as Clark Pinnock and John Sanders are professed evangelicals, and with that normally comes an assumption of inerrancy and infallibility when it comes to God's Word. Whereas adherents of Open Theism make it plain that they are abandoning some of the classic tenets of evangelical theism, they usually do not make such bold comments about Scripture. One could correctly assume that for them to do so would immediately place them outside the bounds of American evangelicalism and open to rightly being accused of pluralist if not liberal leanings.

This is no idle conjecture either. As noted in the Introduction (see footnote 35), both Pinnock and Sanders were openly accused in 2003 in the Evangelical Theological Society of violating the inerrancy clause in its statement of faith. Although exonerated of the charges, over 60% of the membership believed Sanders had done so, with one-third believing the same about Pinnock.¹¹³ In the largest evangelical theological body in North America, this is certainly saying something. Many exclusivists are alarmed by the seeming liberal leanings of both of these prominent North American theologians.

In Pinnock's debate with Hick in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, he makes this humorous comment concerning Hick: "I received the distinct feeling that . . . [Hick] wants to make liberals of us all" (60). In commenting on Hick's pilgrimage from evangelicalism to pluralism, Pinnock notes with sadness, "I contemplate the loss to God's kingdom of a theologian who could be commending God's plan to save the world through Jesus effectively but who has decided not to" (60). Examples of Pinnock's opposition toward liberalism and pluralism in Christian theology can be multiplied from virtually everything he has written. So it may seem odd, on the surface at least, that some would consider the possibility that Pinnock's inclusivism is leading him down a slippery slope toward liberalism.

The oddness of this inquiry can be made all the more troubling when considering some clear statements Pinnock has made concerning his Bibliology. For example, in one of his earliest publications, *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*,¹¹⁴ Pinnock writes: "The Bible in its entirety is God's written Word to man, free of error in its original autographs, wholly reliable in history and doctrine" (1). And nearly twenty years later, Pinnock made this observation:

¹¹² Clark Pinnock is the only inclusivist who has devoted several books to the topic of Bibliology. Therefore, this section will deal almost exclusively with him.

¹¹³ It also serves notice that this section on Bibliology is actually dealing with the apparently milder Pinnock, if the voting of the ETS is any indicator.

¹¹⁴ Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1967.

“Unfortunately, . . . [there is] a major and widespread shift in contemporary theology toward seeing the Bible as a fallible testament of human opinion and religious experience, not the reliable deposit and canon of normative instruction. Although the number of those involved in such a depreciation of the normative authority of the Bible is few in relation to the faithful church as a whole, they are often influential scholars and teachers whose opinions sway the unwary and subvert the faith of those who are weak.”¹¹⁵

Such statements are solidly evangelical. So why is it that Clark Pinnock was accused of denying the ETS statement of faith concerning biblical inerrancy?¹¹⁶ Perhaps the key question to ask is, “Is it inherent in the conclusions made by inclusivism (and Open Theism as well) to abandon an historically evangelical view of Scripture?”¹¹⁷

Some early hints of a turning away from traditional evangelical Bibliology by Pinnock can be found. Consider these comments made in the first edition of *The Scripture Principle*:

“This leaves us with the question, Does the New Testament, did Jesus, teach the perfect errorlessness of the Scriptures? No, not in plain terms” (57).

“Why, then, do scholars insist that the Bible does claim total inerrancy? I can only answer for myself, as one who argued in this way a few years ago. I claimed that the Bible taught total inerrancy because I hoped that it did – I wanted it to” (58).

The second comment hints at a change in Pinnock’s thinking sometime in the early 1980s. The following opinions, also from the same book, show his views to be decidedly different than traditional evangelicalism:

¹¹⁵ *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984) vii. Pinnock also made the following statements in the same book and, ironically, twenty years later was called to task for evidently doing the same thing that he warned against two decades earlier. “The idea that human beings must approach God on his terms, implied by the second commandment, not in ways they themselves define, is simply unacceptable to the autonomous people of today” (24). And in speaking of the common viewpoint among humanistic liberals, Pinnock stated: “The idea that the Bible has the right to limit human freedom of thought and action is a hated idea that must be crushed and eliminated” (25). The irony is that the Open Theism Pinnock came to embrace makes the same objection, namely, that human freedom cannot be violated.

¹¹⁶ Lest anyone think that biblical inerrancy is not a key tenet of North American evangelicalism, it should be noted that the only two theological matters potential members of the Evangelical Theological Society must adhere to in signing their name on the membership application and subsequent statement of faith are the doctrine of the Trinity and a belief in the inerrancy of Scripture.

¹¹⁷ It should be noted that there were several angles taken against Pinnock and Sanders when it came to complaints about their view of biblical inerrancy. Many of those complaints addressed the tenets of Open Theism, such as God’s inability to know the future choices of free agents and how that jibes with God making predictions about the future, and so on. For now, though, attention will be solely given to outright statements concerning Pinnock’s view of inerrancy, not issues which involve “implied inerrancy.”

“What God aims to do through inspiration is to stir up faith in the gospel through the Word of Scripture, which remains a human text beset by normal weaknesses [which includes errors]” (99-100).

“What the Scriptures do is to present a sound and reliable testimony [not an inerrant one] to who he is and what God has done for us” (100).

Pinnock goes on to advocate a “dynamic theory of inspiration” as opposed to the classic, evangelical position of “verbal, plenary inspiration.” In the dynamic theory, room can be made for myth and legend (i.e, things reported as historical fact which were not), scientific and historical error, and failed prophecy. For the latter, the most famous issue of Pinnock’s understanding of failed prophecy involves Jesus’ prediction (Mt. 24:2) that no stones would be left unturned in the destroyed temple. “Despite Jesus, in the destruction of the temple, some stones would be left one on the other” (*Most Moved Mover*, 51).¹¹⁸

A more recent statement of Pinnock sums up his position concerning the Bible:

“The writings contain a long and complex search for the mind of God and in this struggle various points of view compete and interact. In constructing a doctrinal model, therefore, it is important to remember that the Bible is a complex work by many authors whose views may vary and that the text is open to various plausible interpretations” (*Most Moved Mover*, 21).

The above provides enough information to query how different Pinnock’s view is from traditional evangelicalism. However, attention should first be given to a statement from Pinnock that more concerns the specifics of this present study.

In *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, Pinnock discusses the pros and cons of religion. Not wanting to be overly optimistic of non-Christian religions, Pinnock advocates more prudence in this regard.¹¹⁹ However, in a discussion concerning the downside of religions and religious practices, Pinnock turns his attention to the Old Testament and “Israelitism” as an example of “bad religion” (88). Pinnock queries, could this bad religion have been the cause for what is, at times, an Old Testament portrayal of God as “cruel and peevish?” (88). He continues:

“Does this stem from the human side of Scripture? Two factors make that seem possible. . . . It appears that the Old Testament did not always capture the divine nature with full accuracy” (89).

¹¹⁸ Pinnock also advocates a view of the Bible more in line with Barth (“a distance between the Word of God and the text of the Bible” (*Principle*, 99) than Warfield’s total inerrancy position (75).

¹¹⁹ Pinnock does believe, though, that despite Jesus being the “definitive revelation of God” Christians can still learn from other religions, hoping to “sharpen our understanding of what God is intending in the Bible” (45).

One of Pinnock's arguments here is that the Old Testament depiction of a "cruel and peevish" God does not mesh with God as revealed by Jesus, something already noted. However, Pinnock does not provide any criteria on which to determine the trustworthiness of the New Testament canon versus the Old. In other words, why should evangelicals believe that the New Testament provides a faithful picture of the character and nature of God, when the Old Testament has deficiencies in this regard?

Coming from an evangelical, the above comment is a surprising assertion. Pinnock is saying in a very clear statement that the Old Testament could be wrong in its depiction of the nature of God (whereas if evangelicals ever do admit error in Scripture, it is almost always pertaining to some minor point or flaw, such as an error in reporting a scientific or historical fact, not in a major tenet of the faith like the person or character of God). The reason why Pinnock can make such a bold proclamation is because the Old Testament often portrays God in an incredibly stark light. Examples such as his command for Israel to entirely wipe out the inhabitants of Ai – men, women, children, infants, and even animals – strike many as entirely contrary to the God revealed by Jesus. Pinnock's apparent move from the traditional evangelical position concerning biblical inerrancy is precipitated by his dislike of God's judgment.¹²⁰

This is, however, understandable. God's judgment will be a necessary problem for Pinnock and his inclusivism. Although perhaps not as thorny of a problem for Pinnock as for a universalist, God's judgment is problematic nonetheless. A wider hope of salvation must necessarily minimise the judgment of God, at least in comparison with traditional exclusivism. Is it truly possible for evangelical inclusivists to provide salvation for non-Christians and even those opposed to Christianity while at the same time falling short of pluralism's approach to other faiths, and liberalism's approach to Scripture?

The way that Pinnock apparently can get around evangelical complaints of liberalism creeping into his theology is to use the same words that have been traditionally used by evangelicals, only filling them with new meaning. For example, Pinnock continues to use the word "inerrancy," yet not with the same meaning traditionally used by American evangelicals. In the second edition of *The Scripture Principle*, virtually all of the original material written in the first edition over twenty years earlier remained intact. Yet, there had

¹²⁰ Interestingly, in the second edition of *The Scripture Principle*, Pinnock deals with exactly this issue, yet provides three arguments for why evangelicals should not "put this down to human sinfulness and deny the teaching of the Bible at this point" (139). He keeps this comment exactly as it was in the first edition, even though it appears to contradict his comments quoted above in *Wideness*, a book which came in between these two editions.

been over two decades of attacks on Pinnock's view of Scripture coming from more traditional or conservative evangelical scholars, and still, Pinnock stubbornly held to key terms like infallibility and inerrancy. Why?

In one sense, because Pinnock is still very much an evangelical at heart. In the second edition of *The Scripture Principle*, he continues the frontal assault of liberalism that has always been a mainstay of his theology. In his "defense of the full authority and trustworthiness of the Bible," Pinnock consistently takes aim at a view of the Bible which is nothing more than "a fallible testament of human opinion and religious experience."¹²¹ This "decline in respect for the Bible" (8) coincides with a general "age of theological decline" (8) against which Pinnock hopes to provide a renewed "evangelical confidence in the Bible" (9).

Yet, along with his attack of liberalism's far too human view of Scripture comes Pinnock's attack of conservatism's far too divine view. So, even though evangelicals face a "rebelliousness in the modern period" (16-17) among liberal scholars of whom "the Bible lacks credibility in the eyes of those taught to prize human autonomy and self-sufficiency" (a trend among liberals that Pinnock says can be traced back to Schleiermacher) (16), Pinnock also aims at conservative evangelicals who cause even greater problems by "exaggerating the absolute perfection of the biblical text" (17). He bemoans "the tendency among conservatives to exaggerate the absolute perfection of the biblical text" and their unwillingness "to admit any less-than-ideal elements in the orthodox view of the Bible" (14). This Pinnock calls "the conservative burden" (17), and it must be eliminated.

Thus the "Scripture principle" attempts to straddle these two poles, what Pinnock characterises as a "potentially awkward and certainly controversial middle position" (261). On the one hand, it hopes to guard against a "neo-Christianity" which is slipping into "open-ended pluralism" (18). This is done when the full authority of the Scriptures is recognised, a principle that has existed from the very early stages of the Church ("Theology in the premodern period was always done on the assumption that the Bible was the written Word of God" (12)). The authority of the Bible is both a soteriological as well as epistemological belief that is indispensable (13). Pinnock admits that he has "harsh criticism" for liberalism's view of the Bible as nothing more than a "retreat from the notion that God's revelation involves necessary and trustworthy content" (51).¹²²

¹²¹ *The Scripture Principle*, 8. All quotations in this section come from the second edition of this work.

¹²² "For the humanistic liberals, it is subjective revelation or no revelation at all. The objective content is not simply overlooked and omitted, but despised and rejected" (*Scripture Principle*, 50).

On the other hand, lest traditional evangelicals believe that Pinnock is for their side in the epic struggle against liberalism, he takes his battle to a second front. “The old view of the Bible that we treasure is not biblical and serviceable in every detail today” (15). This old view encompasses the notion that the Bible has perfect errorlessness, a “technical and strict” inerrancy (101). Even though Christians should expect “a high degree of ordinary reliability from the Bible” (103), they should not expect absolute perfection as traditional evangelicalism has maintained in its usage of the term “inerrancy.”¹²³ Pinnock expresses this thought in many different ways:

“The Bible did not fall from heaven. . . . Inspiration did not make the writers superhuman. It did not cancel out their historicity and weaknesses” (127).

“A higher degree of perfection would no doubt require a Calvinistic cosmology and a material dictation, but this is not something the Bible aspires to” (131).

“We in the West are schooled to look for exact information and factual accuracy, so when we read the Bible, we expect the same thing” (145).

“Let us not try to be more evangelical than the New Testament” (154).

“The Bible seldom addresses its authority and says nothing about its inerrancy” (266).

Thus Pinnock lays the axe to the roots of two trees. Liberalism views the Bible as too human of a product and thus entirely subjectively (he is contra this neo-Christianity). Yet, traditional evangelicalism has made the opposite error, attributing too much divine control over the production of the Scripture, and not allowing for the human dimension, an emphasis on its objective nature over the subjective (he is for a neo-evangelicalism which counterbalances this error). This is the precarious “middle ground” (263) Pinnock tries to maintain.

This error of evangelicalism has resulted in two main problems. To begin with, it damages Pneumatology and does not allow the freedom necessary for the Spirit to move and work in the modern era. “My core conviction had become one of certainty of truth arising more from the work of the Spirit through the biblical text than from a tight rationalism rooted in the supposed human theory of biblical errorlessness of the text per se” (267). Pinnock prefers a living word as opposed to the dead text of rationalistic evangelicalism. “Through the Spirit, the text comes alive and becomes contemporary to us” (182).

¹²³ Even here Pinnock finds the soiled fingerprints of Augustine: “This is the danger reflected in Augustine’s expression ‘What the Bible says God says’” (*Scripture Principle*, 114, 264).

The second problem is that it also creates atheists. This “quest for an errorless Bible” (125) has “disordered priorities” (125) which result in “the kind of theology that makes atheists” (129). “It is not logical to say that God is in total control of the Bible’s composition and also that there was genuine human authorship” (129-130). Here again Pinnock’s assertion of genuine human freedom is instrumental in his “neo-evangelical” (258) theology.

The human dimension is clear enough according to Pinnock. Traditional evangelicals have bent over backward to make errors disappear and seeming contradictions appear like no contradictions at all. This he contends is a mistake. Evangelicals can affirm both the hand of God in the production of the Bible, and human weakness and error. The latter does not negate the former according to Pinnock, no matter how much evangelicals have suggested otherwise. They should not insist on “a degree of technical accuracy that is foreign to Scripture” (272) when it is clear that there are “scores of minor flaws” (272) in the text. Pinnock goes through a fair amount of examples in this regard, especially looking at the discrepancies between the four Gospels (“these texts were not written to satisfy modern historians or to conform to our current standards of historiography,” 147), as well as the categories of legend and myth often misunderstood by evangelical scholars (142-152).

Yet Pinnock continues to confound his critics by “intentionally” (257) using the term “inerrancy” to describe his view. This irritates the conservatives who have used it almost exclusively up to this point with their own connotation. It also vexes the liberals who would like to see the term discarded entirely. But what does Pinnock mean when he uses the word? Each year he signs with a clear conscience the Evangelical Theological Society’s statement of faith on inerrancy, yet this “revised inerrancy position” (265) causes other evangelicals to object.¹²⁴

For Pinnock, “inerrancy” is not strict errorlessness. If the “Scripture principle” is that “the Bible is the primary and fully trustworthy canon of Christian revelation” (11), inerrancy simply means that the Bible “never leads one astray in regard to what it intentionally teaches” (11). It is an inerrancy that is “less rationalistic . . . less strict and more nuanced” (261). This “modified” (260) view of inerrancy has more to do with meaning than with words (“the

¹²⁴ Pinnock notes the comments he received from a fellow evangelical, Henry Holloman, in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, who first applauded Pinnock for his criticism of liberalism, and then chastised him for a “very lenient view of inerrancy” (*Scripture Principle*, 256). However, Pinnock found an ally in Donald Bloesch when the latter wrote that “the perfect accuracy of the letter or text of Scripture is not an integral part of Christian faith” (264, n. 35). He is also comfortable with Millard Erickson’s definition of inerrancy (104). Still, the general feeling among evangelicals is probably best verbalised by one of the “founding fathers” of the modern American evangelical movement, Carl F. H. Henry, when he said in his review of the first edition of *The Scripture Principle*, Pinnock “retains inerrancy as a concept, but seems to thin it out almost to the breaking point” (261).

meanings, not the *words*, of biblical passages are authoritative” (267, emphasis original)), more with purpose and intention than with the absolute accuracy of everything written therein. “The Bible may contain errors of incidental kinds, but it teaches none” (264). This Pinnock labels an “inerrancy of purpose” (263).

Thus, the problem becomes determining what exactly the Bible intends to teach. “Both early and late in my personal journey, I have believed the Bible to be inerrant in all that it intentionally affirms. What changed in my view is the identification of exactly what the Bible affirms” (264). Thus Pinnock could continue to use the word “inerrancy” so long as it was understood with its new meaning, not “a kind of rational certainty based upon equating the words of the Bible and the words of God” (170), but rather a certainty of purpose and intention. Inerrancy is a “metaphor for the determination to trust God’s Word completely” (261), “in the effectiveness of the Bible to mediate to us salvation in Christ” (171).

If the Bible so clearly does not teach its own inerrancy in the strict evangelical sense, then why have evangelicals traditionally taught this belief, even to the point of making it a fundamental tenet of the faith? Pinnock explains:

“A desire for religious certainty, the need for solid defenses, the logic of inspiration, the experience of God’s reliability in the Bible – all of these move many to tighten up the doctrine of Scripture beyond what is seen in the text and claimed by the text” (85).¹²⁵

Part of Pinnock’s argument stems from the fact that strict inerrancy is not taught in the text, yet evangelicals are traditionally driven by the text when it comes to developing their theology. So, for example, he takes great pains to point out how the New Testament authors used the Old Testament, and how this does not imply a strict view of inerrancy held by traditional evangelicalism (eg., 8, 63, 154, 201). Also, Paul’s view of his own writings should cause evangelicals to rethink their understanding of biblical inerrancy (“The epistles of Paul do not resemble Scriptures sent directly from heaven but are more human than that” (76)). When evangelicals attempt to apply strict inerrancy to the Bible, contrary to the biblical teaching itself, it makes them appear to be Pharisees in their approach to God’s Word (63),

¹²⁵ Ray Roennfeldt sees a connection between the traditional Calvinism which Pinnock abhors and this strict inerrancy he also has come to reject: “It is his [Pinnock’s] contention that a strict belief in biblical inerrancy is incompatible with anything less than belief in Calvinistic determinism,” in *Clark H. Pinnock on Biblical Authority* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993) 364. As Pinnock notes, much of this problem with absolute inerrancy “stems from the Calvinistic orthodoxy underlying so much of the current evangelical movement” (128).

placing a human-developed standard above the Bible.¹²⁶ Thus Pinnock can say that the traditional evangelical view of strict inerrancy is a “theory . . . not well supported exegetically” (85), “lacks exegetical foundations” (85), and makes evangelicals “sitting ducks” (86) for liberal attacks. “All of us live with uncertainty, so why even give the impression that some proven defect could bring the whole house of authority down?” (86).

What is not clear is when exactly according to Pinnock this perfect idea of inerrancy developed in the Church’s history. On the one hand, he seems to affirm that from the very earliest of times the Church has made the mistake of placing too much of an emphasis on the divine dimension of Scripture (15, 96). Yet, modernity is often the bogeyman for Pinnock in this debate, “the assumption of scientific precision and accuracy” (260). “The Bible, not modernity, is normative” (261).

Lastly, faith is not damaged by affirming that the Bible is God’s Word, yet also recognising that it contains errors. “If we come to know God in the Bible, they [the errors] will appear to be relatively unimportant” (154). And in a poetic concluding comment on the last page of this important book (obviously made before the advent of compact disks!), Pinnock notes: “Is it not true that in the Bible we hear the Master’s voice in spite of scratches of the needle on the record?” (272).

In closing, although Bibliology has been left as the last systematic area for investigation, it is by no means the least important. In Barry Callen’s theological biography of Pinnock, he notes that the first major step in Pinnock’s reworked theology came in his doctrine of Scripture. Callen titles the third chapter “Revising Inerrancy” for this very reason. Three of the first writings from Pinnock in his theological career specifically concerned the doctrine of Scripture (*A Defense of Biblical Infallibility*, *Biblical Revelation*, and *The Scripture Principle*). For the latter, Pinnock felt it necessary over twenty years later to release a second edition. This hints that, although Bibliology has not been a major theological area of treatment by inclusivists and open theists (as compared with the coverage they give to areas like Soteriology, Pneumatology, and Theology-proper), it is nonetheless an important area to consider.

2.9 Inclusivism and the Fate of the Unevangelised

The specific Soteriological conclusions of inclusivism can now be addressed. Of course, much of what has already been said can rightly be considered Soteriology, but this section deals very specifically with the fate of those outside the reach of the gospel.

¹²⁶ “Naïve rhetoric about biblical infallibility could easily lead to a tragic Judaizing of the Christian faith” (*Scripture Principle*, 89).

The Christian idea of an eternal place of torment, normally called hell, has been labelled “the most disturbing concept in Christian tradition.”¹²⁷ That is putting it mildly. Note a comment by Oxford philosopher Richard Robinson:

“If it really were probable that we should burn eternally, or not burn eternally, according as we disobeyed or obeyed a certain set of moral laws, that would, indeed, be an excellent reason for obeying them. But . . . it would be a poor reason for respecting them. . . . On the contrary, they and the god who imposed them on us in this unbelievably brutal way, could only be regarded as beneath contempt.”¹²⁸

Pluralist John Hick is just as blunt in his assessment: the doctrine of eternal hell “renders any coherent Christian Theodicy impossible by giving the evils of sin and suffering an eternal lodgment within God’s creation.”¹²⁹

The expectation is that inclusivists would respond similarly. Along with the comment already noted by Pinnock in the discussion of the nature of the “God of Jesus” comes this one in a book which explores four differing views of the concept of hell.

“How can one reconcile this doctrine [eternal, conscious hell] with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Is he not a God of boundless mercy? How then can we project a deity of such cruelty and vindictiveness? Torturing people without end is not the sort of thing the “Abba” Father of Jesus would do” (Crockett, *Four Views*, 140).

In his critique of the literal view of hell, Pinnock speaks of the traditional doctrine as “sadism raised to new levels of finesse” (38), while picking up a common theme in inclusivist teaching: “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not the kind of deity who tortures people (even the worse of sinners) in this way” (38). Such a view of hell and the God who sends people there makes God “morally worse than Hitler” (38) according to Pinnock.¹³⁰ It is “an action easier to associate with Satan than with God” (*Four Views on Hell*, 140), one “out of keeping with the love of God revealed in the gospel” (153).

It would be difficult to determine the precise view of every inclusivist on this topic, but it is reasonable to assume that inclusivists would have a difficult time maintaining an eternal

¹²⁷ William Crockett (ed.) *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) 7.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Travis, *Christ and the Judgment*, 1.

¹²⁹ *Death and Eternal Life* (London: MacMillan, 1990) 201.

¹³⁰ Objections to an eternal hell are nothing new. John Sanders notes that the father of modern liberalism, Schleiermacher, also objected to the notion. He argued that if eternal hell existed, then eternal bliss could not, “since the awareness of those suffering in hell would ruin the blessedness of those in heaven” (*No Other Name*, 97). Pinnock notes that as far back as the Didache, the view of annihilationism was proposed (*Four Views on Hell*, 138; although Crockett rebuts that this belief has no merit, 172).

view of hell within their theological assumptions.¹³¹ For example, John Sanders used to believe in hell as eternal (*No Other Name*, 96-97) but later altered his view, as did Pinnock.¹³² This change appears necessary.¹³³ As inclusivists have given greater and greater emphasis in their elevation of the love of God and the freewill of humanity, hell as an eternal place of conscious torment no longer fits the system. One would like to believe that their theological shift was the result of careful exegesis, but it appears more a theological necessity than a biblical product.

Consider the matter of human freedom. Pinnock makes it clear that universalism is out as an option simply because it would violate human choice. If God saved everyone, then surely he must coerce at least some people who did not want to be saved. Thus, the controlling factor is human freedom.¹³⁴ Coupled with an inclusivist understanding of “God is love,” (what Pinnock terms “love in relation to freedom,” *Four Views on Hell*, 130), this makes the traditional view of hell all the more troublesome, one which “does not cohere well with the character of God disclosed in the gospel” (149). Pinnock refers to this view as one of the “dark notions” that have been held in the Church’s history, along with double predestination and the fewness doctrine (135). It “offends my conviction about God’s love” (164).

Pinnock proposes a “more scriptural, theologically coherent, and practical” option, for fear that those who are appalled by the traditional view of hell may be tempted to adopt universalism (137). Annihilationism portrays a God who is “morally justified in destroying the wicked because he respects their human choices” (151). “To affirm hell means accepting human significance” (151), a sentiment seen earlier voiced by another inclusivist, Gregory Boyd. Because God respects human freedom, he will not “force his friendship upon anyone” (151).

¹³¹ Three alternatives to the traditional view present themselves regularly in evangelical writings today: post-mortem evangelism, wherein people who die not hearing the gospel have a chance after death to hear and make a decision, middle knowledge, whereby God determines who to save based on what they would have decided had they heard the gospel (a view not popular among open theists who believe God cannot know such things), and annihilationism, which is apparently the most popular view among inclusivists, although still quite the minority view among evangelicals in general (Pinnock, *Four Views on Hell*, 161). This dissertation will only investigate this third option in detail.

¹³² Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 329.

¹³³ In fact, nearly forty years ago Joseph Dabney Bettis recognised that evangelicals were beginning to lean toward annihilationism in “A Critique of the Doctrine of Universal Salvation,” *Religious Studies* 6 (Dec. 1970) 329-344.

¹³⁴ Pinnock further notes that those who hold to predestination are not consistent unless they adopt full-blown universalism (*Four Views on Hell*, 128, 141-142). One has to admire Pinnock’s tenacity when it comes to his relentless attacks on Calvinist theology, as well as on Augustine. He also finds Augustine’s teaching on hell as “overwhelming” and the primary reason why the traditional view held traction for so long (139). Lastly, he sees a Hellenistic influence on Christian doctrine, one which teaches the immortality of the soul (147-149).

An obvious practical consideration is the issue of missions, something quite prominent in evangelical theology. In fact, much of the modern missions movement has been fuelled by the notion that those who do not hear the gospel are eternally condemned to a literal hell. Thus, once the traditional view of hell is called to task, it stands to reason that missions as one of the practical matters will soon follow in the debate. To put it succinctly, if inclusivists no longer adopt the traditional view of hell, and if they are more open to non-Christian faiths than evangelicals have historically been, where does that put missions in their thinking? Should evangelicalism adopt the proposals of inclusivism, is it not a logical consequence of these changes that missions will no longer be emphasised as strongly as it once was? It is what Ronald Nash has termed “the pesky problem of missions” (Nash, 1994: 165).¹³⁵

These are fair questions to ask, and inclusivists are certainly not ignorant of them. Pinnock, for example, does note that died-in-the-wool exclusivists such as John Stott and Michael Green have adopted annihilationism yet still maintain a strong stance on world missions (*Four Views on Hell*, 150-151). He also believes that the traditional view of hell actually works counter to the gospel message, turning people away from faith (39). But this still does not address the wider dilemma, that of the positive view inclusivists take of non-Christian religions.

John Sanders addresses this issue directly and provides three inclusivist rebuttals to the claim that exclusivism better motivates people for missions (*No Other Name*, 266-267; also 284-285). First, there have been people in the past who have not been exclusivists, yet who have pushed for greater expansion in missions. Sanders names Erasmus (whom he anachronistically labels an inclusivist) in this regard. Second, unevangelised unbelievers may indeed have salvation, but are not experiencing the “fullness of salvation in Christ.” This is a theme also seen in Pinnock’s “full-strength salvation” notion (*Wideness*, 105). Third, a view of missions which primarily imparts new information to the unreached is not a proper view of missions. “The principle problem is will, not ignorance” (267). Therefore, the primary goal of missions is to give people an opportunity to respond. In this sense, then, the missions endeavour is not at all minimised by inclusivism when its purpose is properly understood. Professor of philosophy at Roberts Wesleyan College, David Basinger, can even say that the inclusivist understanding of missions has “the most significant impact on whether others will

¹³⁵ D.A. Carson sees the doctrine of annihilationism as detrimental to the cause of world missions in *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996) 536, as does Robert Peterson in “Fallacies in the Annihilationism Debate: A Response to Glenn Peoples,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June, 2007) 355.

develop their relationship with God” (*Openness*, 175), although he does not precisely explain how this is so.

Pinnock takes up this theme with vigour. He believes that a missionary zeal should be “natural and spontaneous” within every Christian (*Flame*, 142). Missions is not just taking the good news to the ends of the earth and leaving it at that. Rather, missions is part and parcel of an act of discipleship (142), with the ultimate goal of world transformation (147). This guards from a “one-sided” view of missions (240). Because inclusivists believe that God has already gone before them, this can actually improve their motivation and enhance their hope in missions (*Four Views on Salvation*, 120). Even though through general revelation or another religious tradition a person knows God and has a relationship with him, missions can bring that person into the “fullness of salvation,” “higher up and deeper in, to know God better and love God more” (120).

Pinnock does ask a hard question. What happens if a person, upon hearing the message of Christ, still prefers his or her non-Christian faith? Pinnock, however, does not directly answer his own question. Instead, he prefers to leave it “with the grace of God,” who knows best how to handle such a situation (120). This is not the most satisfying answer, because it would serve as a good test question for the validity of the inclusivist model.

There is a growing trend within inter-faith discussions to reformulate missions as verbalised better in the language of “dialogue.” This has become a key word in the discussion of the purpose of Christian missions since the World Council of Churches New Delhi conference of 1961. Dialogue has now become the primary goal of missions, with evangelism taking a secondary role.¹³⁶ Previously, Christian missions was too arrogant and imperialistic. This attitude is verbalised clearly by David Paton: “Christian missions are a part of the total imperialist aggression of the West.”¹³⁷ Rather than a monologue, where the missionary goes to a people and speaks in a one-way manner, much like a sermon, missions should resemble a dialogue, a two-way give-and-take between equals.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ South African professor Piet Meiring prefers the term “trilogue,” recognising the Holy Spirit’s role in such matters, who “performs a wonderful convincing work in both the hearts of the other two” (*A World of Religions: A South African Perspective* (Pretoria: Kagiso Publishers, 1996) 56.

¹³⁷ *Christian Missions and the Judgment of God* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1953) 35.

¹³⁸ A recent example of such a movement is found in the Reformed Ecumenical Council. In their regular publication *New Exchange* (Vol. 42, No. 8-9, August-September, 2005), an article (“Assembly Adopts Statement on Religious Pluralism”) about multi-religious dialogue summarises the work of ten years. The REC Assembly, involving 34 member churches and 112 delegates now recognises three levels or stages of interaction between Christianity and other religions, with the highest being “complete harmony and cooperation.” An inter-religious dialogue committee was soon to be established according to the report.

Pinnock sees great promise in dialoguing with adherents of other faiths. Based on his understanding of general revelation, which was already considered in detail, Pinnock believes there is truth to be found in non-Christian religions and that Christians can learn from them (*Wideness*, 132). McDermott gives an emphatic yes to the question posed in his book, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?*, and Daniel Clendenin sees positives in dialoguing with those of other faiths, even where disagreement exists (1995:113-115).

Yet, inclusivists do not go as far as pluralists on the matter. Whereas pluralists believe that all the truth claims of all the religions are valid, inclusivists hesitate at such a notion. Pinnock notes that “relativism threatens and does not enhance dialogue” (*Wideness*, 134); therefore evangelicals must not water-down the Christian message simply to gain mutual appreciation. In fact, “truth-seeking encounters” must have three basic elements (138-143): a willingness to appreciate other religions and to learn from them, taking globalisation seriously, and asking critical questions of each other.

It is this third element that most resembles traditional missions and evangelism. Pinnock contends that true love warns of impending danger. It does not simply coddle differences, but where those differences are of a crucial or life-threatening nature, it may be necessary to press issues further than is comfortable. “Love has the courage to confront. . . . Truth matters. Ideas have consequences” (142).

What is the bottom line? What happens to people who die never hearing the gospel? Hell as a place of eternal, conscious torment has fallen out of favour with many inclusivists, and non-Christian religions are now more highly esteemed. This yields a “wider hope” that is meant to create greater appreciation for the love of God and his willingness to allow humans freedom of choice. When Pinnock agrees with the Vatican II notion that even an atheist can be saved when he “responds positively [to God] implicitly by acts of love shown to the neighbor” (*Wideness*, 98), a clue is provided as to what he would say about religious people in general. Inclusivists do not call it a wider hope for nothing. Theirs is a hope that salvation will bring in vastly more people than traditional evangelicalism has credited.

This brings back a common theme among inclusivists: “*Knowledge* of the Saviour is not a necessary constituent of *being* saved: not, that is, in this life, and not in the sense that historical knowledge about the events of Jesus of Nazareth is required” (White, 1991:112; emphasis original). “Each person’s destiny will ultimately be determined by God on the basis of the ‘light’ available to him or her (or by other criteria)” (Basinger, *Openness*, 175). Even one who rejects the very concept of God can be saved in this scheme. Given such an

understanding, it is no wonder why many exclusivists see inclusivism rapidly sliding toward pluralism and hence liberalism.

2.10 Summary of Inclusivism and Its Views

The heart of inclusivism can be found in its commitment to God as supremely love. It is here that the fundamental assumptions are made concerning God and his dealings with all people, especially as they relate to human freedom and autonomy. Because God exists in a dynamic, social Trinity, with the Holy Spirit as the “bond of love,” a recognition of God’s presence in his creation should not only be sought, but should be expected, in all corners of the globe. The typical evangelical approach to non-Christian religions, which is to consider them false means to approaching God and attaining salvation, must be rethought. God through his Spirit is at work in all areas of his creation, and this especially in the religious arena. He is not solely limited to the sphere of Christianity and the Church, as the biblical example of pagan saints teaches.

From this can be seen why inclusivists have a wider hope of salvation. Contra traditional evangelicalism, inclusivism envisions a world where God’s Spirit is salvifically active in all spheres. The dismal understanding of a Calvinism expressed in American TULIP language - that God has predetermined the salvation of a relatively few number of people, while passing over the rest - is replaced by an Arminian hermeneutic of optimism whereby God’s saving presence is active in the natural world as well as in human culture. The classical theism of evangelicalism is replaced by a radical formulation which works to preserve humanity’s free response to God’s universal love, while not falling into the error of a full-blown universalism.

The result is an evangelical theological system which at times appears less than evangelical, yet can be said to possess the true heart of evangelicalism, namely, the salvation of humanity from the grip of darkness. Whether or not inclusivism can honestly accomplish this noble goal is left to be evaluated in the next section.

Chapter 3

An Evangelical Evaluation of Inclusivism via an Application of a Hermeneutic of Judgment

A presentation of the main tenets of evangelical inclusivism followed a logical progression through the beliefs of that system. The goal was to see what lay at the heart of inclusivism's theology and why it can make conclusions which appear contrary to traditional evangelicalism.

The starting point was God's nature as the epitome of love, a love which respects the dignity and freewill of his creatures. This image of God as supremely loving is built upon the inclusivist understanding of the teaching of Jesus, which became the next step. Then followed the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, who as the bond of love is seen moving throughout God's creation and especially within the religious sphere of humanity. This has resulted in a greater openness to non-Christian religions by inclusivists, including a new understanding of the purpose of missions and a reformulation of the reality of hell. Only near the end of the summary was the inclusivist view of Scripture detailed.

However, with the evaluation of inclusivism, the doctrine of Scripture must come first. This is done because there exists a suspicion that everything inclusivists conclude is based on a faulty reading of the Bible. Benefit of the doubt should be given to the inclusivists when they say that God's Word is of supreme importance to them. Yet, some of their statements concerning Scripture sound dangerously close to liberalism, not evangelicalism.

Therefore, the systematic analysis of key tenets of inclusivism begins by discussing certain bibliological matters which impinge upon an evangelical evaluation of God's judgment. Because the answers the inclusivist often gives when addressing the fate of the non-Christian are radically different from those of traditional evangelicalism, investigation is necessary to determine if this is due to any difference in approach to or view of Scripture by the inclusivist.

Next will come a study of the importance Pneumatology plays in inclusivism, testing the relationship between an inclusivist's Bibliology and Pneumatology, and analysing the positive view inclusivism has of non-Christian religions. This is because of the intimate link between God's Word and God's Spirit, the latter inspiring and authoring the former.

The study will continue with the Godhead, first with an eye to the Son. Inclusivists have made "the God of Jesus" a big part of their argument, so the teaching of Jesus with respect to the judgment of God will be investigated. This will have some effect on the evangelical view

of the Trinity, the continuity between the Old and New Testaments, and how in the person of Jesus Christ, the judgment of God is presented, both in word and in action.

From here comes Theology-proper. Inclusivism is the soteriological arm of Open Theism, the latter producing some radical deviations from historic, orthodox Christianity when it comes to the nature of God. Does a more “open” view of God mute a starker view of his judgment?

The final two systematic considerations will involve Hamartiology and Soteriology. Can it rightly be said that the positive view inclusivism has for general revelation and non-Christian religions is a result of a Hamartiology which is not nearly so pessimistic as evangelicalism has typically made it out to be? What role does the *imago Dei* have in all of this?

Lastly, Soteriology and the fate of the unevangelized will be covered. Here consideration will be given to the main alternative to the traditional view of hell, annihilationism, and how this view if adopted by the wider evangelical community might affect world missions.

The above course may at first appear a bit unorthodox. Normally, a systematic approach to the Godhead will start with the Father and *end* with the Holy Spirit. But the theological construction of inclusivism and Open Theism is quite pneumatological. Consider their very positive view of non-Christian religions, which is only so positive because of their view of the role of the Spirit in the lives of non-Christians. Therefore, it makes good sense to start with the Third Person of the Trinity and work backward, as it were.

It should also be noted that not all the matters discussed in this dissertation can be neatly pigeonholed into any one systematic area. For example, where is the best place to put a discussion about the inclusivist view of non-Christian religions, in Pneumatology or Soteriology? The former has been chosen, but that does not mean the topic could not equally be placed in the latter. There will be some necessary overlap of the categories and topics, but an attempt will be made to reduce any redundancy to its bare minimum.

3.1 How Evangelical Is Inclusivism’s Bibliology?

A Bibliological Reflection on Judgment

When starting with a bibliological evaluation of inclusivism, several questions need to be asked. Clearly, there were many people within the Evangelical Theological Society’s membership who thought that the views of Pinnock and Sanders were less than evangelical when it came to their beliefs concerning Scripture and inerrancy. Even though the final vote on the matter exonerated both men, as Norman Geisler noted in a paper circulated at the ETS

annual meeting in 2003, it was no “tempest in a tea pot” (“A Response to the ETS Executive Committee’s Decisions on Clark Pinnock and John Sanders,” 2). There were very real concerns by a large number of the membership, such that formal proceedings took place with the possibility that both men would be removed. Such proceedings do not happen that often within ETS, and so it must be asked, how much validity was there to the allegations?¹³⁹

In light of what has already been noted in the Introduction, some have expressed alarm at the seeming liberalism that has crept into Open Theism, especially as it relates to its language and methodology. Throughout the whole proceedings, the views of John Sanders were clearly seen as more against the ETS ethos of inerrancy than those of Pinnock, such that when it came time for a final recommendation by the ETS Executive Committee (October 24, 2003), the nine-member panel recommended unanimously not to expel Pinnock, but by a vote of 7-2 they recommended that Sanders be expelled.¹⁴⁰

It is the intention of this bibliological section to investigate the allegations against Pinnock.¹⁴¹ Is his view of Scripture as solidly evangelical as he says, or is it as liberal as some alarmist exclusivists have made it out to be?

It has already been seen that Pinnock’s view of Scripture has changed over the decades. Pinnock maintained a solidly evangelical point-of-view when he wrote *A Defense of Biblical Infallibility* in 1967, but by the time he penned *The Scripture Principle* in 1984, he had begun to question the traditional evangelical understanding of inerrancy, a major misstep in contemporary American evangelicalism. Pinnock’s doctrine of Scripture began to appear more in line with neo-orthodoxy’s understanding of partial inspiration than the verbal, plenary inspiration of evangelicalism. This enabled Pinnock to adopt a view which allows the Bible to make errors in ancillary elements such as historical or scientific reporting, while still maintaining the spiritual truths contained therein.

It should be noted that “inerrancy” is not a magical term somehow dreamed up by evangelicals or conservative scholars. It simply means what the Bible elsewhere says when it

¹³⁹ A plethora of material on the entire proceedings, including not only the original briefs filed against Pinnock and Sanders, but also official documents of the ETS Executive Committee, comments made by other members, and the final vote tallies can be found from the hotlink on the homepage of www.etsjets.org.

¹⁴⁰ Pinnock agreed at the last hour to retract some statements that he had made in his publications, which appeased the Executive Committee. Sanders also retracted one key comment made in *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998) that the Bible was “mistaken,” but this was not enough to mollify other concerns the Committee had. The only two votes to not expel Sanders were the result of committee members who felt that the ETS had not thoroughly enough defined what it meant by inerrancy in its statement of faith and as such, it could not be used against Sanders. Since the final vote, the ETS has revised its statement on biblical inerrancy and made it somewhat more thorough. Sanders himself went under review at Huntington College, the institution where he had taught for the past seven years (<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2004/151/32.0.html>). He was ultimately given leave from his post.

¹⁴¹ The milder inclusivist view of the two men in question has been chosen for this particular section.

calls God's words "perfect" (eg., Ps. 19:7) or "truth" (eg., Jn. 17:17). Therefore, Pinnock's comment, "Looking at the actual biblical evidence . . . the case for total inerrancy just is not there" (*Scripture Principle*, 85; all subsequent quotations in this section come from this work unless otherwise noted), is a bit misleading. To be sure, the word "inerrancy" is not present anymore than the word "Trinity" is, yet the concept is there.

Inerrancy is rooted in God's nature. Because evangelicals believe God to be without error, they believe that his Word is also without error.¹⁴² Pinnock begins to address this matter (83) but never actually concludes it. His discussion in this section is less than satisfactory, as his argument basically boils down to a "God has decided to give us a text with errors, therefore we have a text with errors" argument. He prefers to consider the Bible "generally reliable" (84) and those who consider it inerrant in the strict sense to be "elevating reason over Scripture" (85). However, is this charge fair?

Pinnock appears unclear on a minor point about the origin of the inerrancy issue, but this exposes a larger problem in his reasoning. As noted earlier, he lays the blame for inerrancy first at the feet of modernity, but later he considers it a problem that has existed even from the Patristic period. This confusion is problematic for his basic thesis that traditional evangelicals have abandoned a biblical view of Scripture for one that is rationalistic. If the inerrancy doctrine is truly a post-Enlightenment creation, then perhaps his thesis has some merit. But once it can be found in the teaching of Calvin or Luther, or Augustine (as Pinnock also hints at several times), or all the way back to the Apostolic Fathers, his argument folds.¹⁴³ More clarity is needed from Pinnock before evangelicals can wholeheartedly endorse his contention that his fellow inerrancy evangelicals are really rationalists influenced more by modernity than Scripture.

Is God capable of inspiring an errorless text and maintaining human freedom while doing so? Apparently not according to Pinnock. But why not? Why is an infinite, all-wise God not able to do this? Apparently because this would negate human freedom. Pinnock does not

¹⁴² Some have argued that the doctrine of inerrancy is a new creation, but this is certainly an error. The bare word is relatively recent, but it is simply theological shorthand for what Scripture itself teaches about God's words, and what theologians like Luther and Calvin, and all the way back to the early Church fathers, taught concerning God's Word. The belief that the Word of God is without error is something attested by the fathers from the earliest of days (as even Pinnock recognises), even though they did not have the theological shorthand of "inerrancy" to use to describe it.

¹⁴³ It is recognised that "inerrancy" is a term loaded with meaning, depending to whom one is talking. Traditional evangelicals have used the term to speak of the Bible as being free from error in the original, inspired manuscripts. Even though the Word of God has played varying roles throughout the Church's history, traditional evangelicals contend that this idea of inerrancy has existed throughout that time, and is not simply a product of post-Enlightenment evangelicalism. Pinnock appears to agree with this recognition, yet also believes not only that modern evangelicals are wrong about it, but so were others in the past such as Augustine and the Patristic Fathers, who treated the Bible as too perfect.

care for the technical accuracy of modernism when it comes to the Bible, yet is this not precisely what he is aiming for? He claims that a strict inerrancy is not compatible with human autonomy, but why not? Only in a strict, rationalistic system are they incompatible. In a post-modern system which values ambiguity surely these two can remain in tension. On this precise area, Pinnock appears much more modern than post-modern.

Turning to the matter of cultural influence, Pinnock has placed himself in a difficult position. On the one hand, he rejects modernity's influence on the evangelical doctrine of the Bible. Yet, he also does not want to adopt an entirely post-modern view of Scripture, one which makes the meaning of its narratives change like the wind, a hermeneutic "subject to the reader's whims and desires" (230). Yet Pinnock can still characterise his own Bibliology as reflecting "a postmodern lack of anxiety . . . content with soft rather than hard rational supports" (257). It is the "ability to live with ambiguity" (258) inherent more in a post-modern than modern worldview.

Whereas Pinnock says that evangelicals (and particularly those with Calvinist leanings) are more influenced by modernity than Scripture when it comes to their doctrine of the Bible, does Pinnock not make a similar mistake? Is he more influenced by post-modernity than Scripture? Or is that question too simplistic, and he is influenced equally by both? One theologian has noted that the general move from the traditional evangelical view of inspiration to one that is more "dynamic" and akin to Pinnock's view is the result of a larger paradigm shift from theological determinism to free-will theism (Roennfeldt, 349-361). If this is true, then Pinnock's conclusions about inerrancy may simply be the shifting tide of culture and not due to a careful consideration of Scripture.

Clark Pinnock has categorically stated that both God's Word and God himself can make errors. For many American evangelicals, this fact alone seals the deal, and they would not even bother with a further evaluation of Pinnock's teaching. If you say the Bible contains errors, for them you have de facto lost the right to call yourself an evangelical.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of Pinnock's comments on his view of Scripture is found in his view of the Old Testament portrayal of God as "cruel and peevish" and therefore at odds with the "God of Jesus." "It appears that the Old Testament did not always capture the divine nature with full accuracy" (*Wideness*, 89).

Earlier it was asked, "Is it inherent in the conclusions made by inclusivism (and Open Theism as well) to abandon an historically evangelical view of Scripture?"¹⁴⁴ It is here that a

¹⁴⁴ Ronald Nash thinks so, and he sees a "disturbing similarity" in the way inclusivists and pluralists approach the Bible (1994:171-172).

hermeneutic of judgment helps. Clark Pinnock is a self-confessed evangelical, and as such he believes in the Bible as God's holy Word. Therein believers find God speaking to them directly, without muddled voice or muffled meaning. What is read there is what God says, clearly, openly, unswervingly. As an evangelical, Pinnock also believes in Jesus Christ as the only Mediator between God and humanity. There are no other rivals to God incarnating, becoming a human in one unique individual and historical moment. What can be said about Jesus in this regard can be said about no one else.

Given the above, it is rather surprising to see Pinnock disregard what amounts to nearly half of everything Jesus said. He cannot disregard certain words from the mouth of Jesus found in the Gospels as if they were later creations by the early church, or fabrications concocted in a pre-scientific, pre-tolerance-loving age. The things liberal scholars find unappealing in the Gospels can be discarded because they have a view of Scripture which allows them this freedom, but Pinnock works from a different paradigm. When he sees Jesus speaking and acting in the Gospels, he believes as most evangelicals do that this is precisely what Jesus said and did. So how then can he go and ignore a large portion of the Gospels for the sake of his inclusivism?

An interesting question to ask is, "Was Jesus an inclusivist?" Indeed, if Jesus were an inclusivist as Pinnock is, then there should be little to no talk of judgment and God's wrath, which is precisely what is found with Pinnock's and other inclusivists' writings. Pinnock the inclusivist speaks very little about God's holy wrath against and judgment of sin. If Jesus were an inclusivist, should there not be similar behaviour? Rather, Jesus consistently speaks about God's judgment (this will be seen later in the Christological section of the evaluation). Pinnock takes the words of mercy and grace which fall from the lips of Jesus and he plays them against the words of wrath and judgment, making the latter virtually disappear. From an inclusivist perspective, this can be expected. Why is Jesus not found doing the same thing? Could it be because he was not a prophet of inclusivism?¹⁴⁵

There is a certain selectivity which characterises the approach to Scripture many inclusivists take, and a main tactic of that selectivity is to ignore or dismiss those passages which speak about the judgment of God. This is particularly true when it comes to the teaching of Jesus, who otherwise plays a big role in the inclusivist position. This methodology is alarmingly similar to that used by pluralists like John Hick, and if the

¹⁴⁵ Nash has an interesting section in his book, *Is Jesus the Only Savior*, in which he attempts to read the Book of Acts through inclusivist eyes (172-174). His conclusion is, if Peter and Paul were inclusivists, they would not have talked nor acted the way they did as recorded by Luke. Although the idea is a bit anachronistic, it still is interesting nonetheless.

methodology is similar, is it not to be expected that many of the conclusions will also be similar? Put another way, can the positive view that inclusivists have of non-Christian religions be the result of a Bibliology that is less than evangelical?

For now, it must be recognised that inclusivism's view of Scripture, as embodied in two of its most prominent representatives, is closer to a pluralist position than to an exclusivist one. That is cause for some concern, and as the evaluation of inclusivist theology continues, this must be kept in mind. Much of the ethos of both inclusivism and pluralism involves a reading of Scripture that is anti-judgmental, a "hermeneutic of hope" which all but eliminates a "hermeneutic of judgment." However, should a proper balance not be sought between the two, given the biblical data?

3.1.1 Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth

Part of the problem appears to be an apparent bifurcation by inclusivists between the Old Testament and the New. For example, Pinnock plays an Old Testament picture of the nature of God against one found in the teaching of Jesus. This false dichotomy can have some negative consequences as already seen.

In one of John Sanders' key contributions to this debate, *No Other Name*, he has a section devoted to universalism and specifically the key biblical texts in support of this soteriological position (83-89). This is now considered because it impinges upon inclusivism's positive view of other faiths, which in turn is driven by inclusivism's view of the Father as portrayed by the Son, a view of universal love. He states that the universalistic passages fall under five categories:

1. Those which affirm God's desire to save all people;
2. Those which proclaim the universal atonement of Christ;
3. Those which articulate the implications of the universal atoning work of Christ;
4. Those which refer to the consummation of God's plan of salvation in which all people are finally redeemed; and
5. Those which refer to damnation and separation.

In the first four categories above, one would expect to find a considerable amount of universalistic teaching coming from the Gospels. However, the exact opposite is the case.

Sanders lists seven key texts for the first two categories, and none of them come from the Gospels.¹⁴⁶

The first text from the Gospels comes in category three, “and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself” (John 12:32).¹⁴⁷ All other passages come from the pen of Paul. Category four is entirely devoted to the teaching of Paul, and Sanders notes here: “Universalists usually cite Paul as the New Testament writer who saw most clearly the salvation of all people in the consummation” (84). However, there are certainly many passages from Paul’s epistles which also support eternal damnation.¹⁴⁸

This will impinge upon this study of inclusivism, which builds largely upon the love and forgiveness of God as seen through and taught by his Son. There is an inconsistent hermeneutic utilised by many inclusivists, and this is no more clearly seen than in their coverage of the judgment of God.

There are virtually no statements from the mouth of Jesus which support universalism. Yet, the vast amount of material from Jesus which supports an exclusivist position is virtually ignored by most inclusivists, and that may be putting things gently. Every author of the New Testament has something to say about the wrath and judgment of God, as did Jesus, but it plays little to no role in the theology of inclusivism.

“It is the first business of an interpreter to let the author say what he does say, instead of attributing to him what we think he ought to say.”¹⁴⁹ The same holds true when it comes to the words of Jesus. Do evangelicals really want to be accused of excising certain statements of Jesus because they do not like them? From a conservative point of view, it looks very much to be arbitrary at best the approach that some scholars take to the teaching of Jesus and the Gospel accounts. Those who do not take a conservative position on this matter seemingly do so with little to no basis. An imbalanced hermeneutic is often used which is tilted in favour of the preconceptions of the particular scholar.

Without wandering into a full-blown analysis of the Gospels, it need only be noted that exclusivism does not have the problems which some inclusivists have when it comes to

¹⁴⁶ Here are the passages: category 1 – 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; 2 Pet. 3:9; and category 2 – 1 John 2:2; Heb. 2:9; Tit. 2:11; 2 Cor. 5:19. Interestingly, three of these passages come from the Pastoral Epistles, letters characteristically claimed by liberal scholars to not have come from Paul but rather from a Pauline pretender.

¹⁴⁷ Sanders also refers to John 10:16, but this passage about other sheep knowing the voice of Jesus need not imply a *universal* atoning work.

¹⁴⁸ Interestingly, in an earlier section in the book, Sanders notes that “we discover a wide array of texts that may be called exclusive.” Here he provides five texts, three from the mouth of Jesus, two from the Book of Ephesians (28).

¹⁴⁹ John Calvin, quoted in Virkler, Henry A. *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 67.

approaching the narratives concerning Jesus. This flows from an exclusivist understanding of inerrancy in which all the material of the Gospels is reliable and authoritative, an inerrancy which Pinnock and Sanders have questioned. Once the foundations of inerrancy are eroded, it becomes easier to excise those portions of Scripture which do not correspond nicely to one's theological constructs, even if some of those portions come from the lips of Jesus (the very type of deductive approach that Pinnock abhors).

Three other matters need brief comment. First, in Pinnock's redefinition of the term "inerrancy," he prefers to think of it as an inerrancy of purpose. In other words, the Bible is only error-free in those things it intends to teach. All other areas can potentially contain error.

Several questions need to be considered here. What does the Bible "intentionally teach?" Upon what basis does one choose which passage is intentional and which unintentional? If the words of the Bible cannot be equated with the words of God, how can evangelicals be certain that the Bible truly is inerrant in its purpose and message of salvation in Jesus Christ?

It has already been seen that Pinnock considers at least one characterisation of God found in the Old Testament to be the product of bad religion and not an accurate portrayal of God's nature. But when all the passages in the Old Testament which speak of God in such "peevish" ways are considered, they amount to a considerable portion of the testament. Were all these unintentional teachings that can be ignored?

Second, how can the words of the text not be important, but the overall meaning is? Is the meaning not found in the words themselves? (Pinnock: "the *meanings*, not the *words*, of biblical passages are authoritative," *Scripture Principle*, 267, emphasis original). Can it rightly be said that an automobile can be entirely comprised of aeroplane parts, yet still be an automobile? To what extent can the whole be defined while ignoring the parts? Henry's critique of Pinnock earlier noted (p. 82, n. 82) seems justified. At what point can someone redefine a word and still attempt to maintain its usage in the same circles, without creating mass confusion?

Third, why does Pinnock still use the term "inerrancy?" As one critic sarcastically suggested, perhaps he still uses the word "to placate a constituency" that wants to see the proper "password."¹⁵⁰ Whatever the case, once the term has been emptied of most of its

¹⁵⁰ Randy Maddox, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 21, nos. 1-2 [Spring-Fall 1986] 206. Erickson quotes John Randall as noting that when liberal theologians use the same terms but with different meanings, normally unbeknownst to laypeople who may read their works, they are acting hypocritically (*Evangelical Left*, 15). He later quotes William Hordern with a similar sentiment, "To both the fundamentalist and the nonconservative, it often seems that the new conservative is trying to say, 'The Bible is inerrant, but of course this does not mean it is without errors'" (28).

traditional meaning, there seems little reason to keep it. The “reliability” of God’s Word seems far better.

3.1.2 Liberal Disdain for Judgment

Labels are helpful when attempting to define and explain theological categories. However, they can also be abused by those bent on tearing down their enemies. The term “liberal” is just such a label. Some evangelicals have used it to describe inclusivist and open theist teachings because it is immediately received negatively by evangelicals.

However, Clark Pinnock is also fond of using it, and as noted several times, he attacks liberalism with an energy unmatched by many of the very evangelicals who would call Pinnock a liberal. Still, how justified is the fear that many evangelicals share that Pinnock has gone too far in his theology? In evaluating this charge, Pinnock’s own understanding of what constitutes a liberal approach to God’s Word will be used.

In *The Scripture Principle*, Pinnock sets down several descriptions of what constitutes a liberal approach to Scripture. A dislike for authority, especially of a religious nature, is something that characterises liberalism (16). It begins by questioning God’s Word and ends with viewing it as a “fallible testament” (8). The resulting subjective approach to the Bible ultimately spawns an “open-ended pluralism” and the ability to make the Bible say whatever someone wants it to say (18). The error in “nonconservative modern theology” is the “retreat from content-full revelation” as Pinnock shows through a brief historical review (46-49). He continues with a harsh critique of liberalism’s movement away from the idea that God’s revelation is trustworthy (51), labelling such people as those who “refuse to submit to the text” (92). He agrees with Packer’s assessment that before the nineteenth century, no significant Christian thinker questioned the authority of the Bible. Now, however, liberal Christian scholars have made the Bible nothing more than a “human religious document” (230). This opposition to Scripture ultimately results in heresy (237).

If only Pinnock would remain here, in his vehement opposition to liberalism, he would be the darling of all evangelicalism. But many see in his theology some of the very things he criticises in others. For example, has Pinnock not also watered-down the trustworthiness of God’s Word by introducing the belief that it contains scores of errors? Although liberalism rejects all of the Bible according to Pinnock, does he not at least discard some of it, the portions that he finds most at odds with his inclusivism and Open Theism? Pinnock fears that heresy can creep in, taking advantage of people less trained to recognise it. But once he has told the masses that the Bible has scores of errors, has he not undermined the entire endeavour

he claimed he was undertaking, namely, to recapture an “evangelical confidence in the Bible” (9)? Is it wrong to expect typical Christians with a Bible in their hand, wondering out loud which portions they are allowed to ignore?

Clearly Pinnock is not a full-blown liberal, but he has suggested that at least some of the Old Testament depictions of God’s character are fallible, as well as at least one prediction of Jesus. His apparent dislike for the judgment of God, even when found in the teaching of Jesus, is yet another concern. Just as much as supernatural miracles, for example, are problematic for liberals who come from modernist presuppositions, it appears that Pinnock’s post-modern presuppositions cause him difficulty when considering the judgment of God, especially on those outside the present or past reach of the gospel.

That is why he is an inclusivist, and one gets the impression that he is not an inclusivist because he first studied Scripture and found it there (as his theological pilgrimage suggests, one which did not begin with a careful review of Scripture, but rather with a theological review of his presuppositions). Rather, he is an inclusivist who then went to Scripture to find support for it.

3.1.3 Conclusion to Bibliological Evaluation

There are some good reasons why inclusivist evangelicals have been called to task by other evangelicals when it comes to their approach to Scripture. Inclusivists like Clark Pinnock have slowly but surely slid from the traditionally high view of Scripture found in American evangelicalism, to one which is more suspect and appears to maintain more affinity with the Bibliology of pluralist and liberal scholars. Pinnock’s movement in this way can be attributed, at least in part, to his dislike of certain portrayals of God which appear too austere and judgmental. This works itself out in his treatment of the teaching of Jesus, which have been hinted at so far, but which will be covered in more detail later. A hermeneutic of judgment needs to be infused into the growing inclusivism of American evangelicalism lest it continue its slide into liberalism.

Because there is such an intimate link between Bibliology and Pneumatology, this study will briefly return to Bibliology after the inclusivist doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been evaluated.

3.2 Are non-Christian Religions a Vehicle through Which God Draws Humans to Himself?

A Pneumatological Reflection on Judgment

This study will continue to concentrate on Pinnock's inclusivism, in order to keep the material to a reasonable and workable level. However, the views of other inclusivists will be noted as the need arises. It is recognised, though, that Pinnock appears at the forefront of inclusivism's development of Pneumatology. He is the only inclusivist who has devoted an entire book solely to the subject.

To begin with, Pinnock should be applauded for his comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In the debates which have marked the past two decades in American evangelicalism, there have been few, thorough theological treatises such as *Flame of Love*. Pinnock insightfully looks for connections between his Pneumatology and all other areas of doctrine in an attempt to tie any loose ends that had previously existed in his inclusivism.

The difficulty, though, is not so much in Pinnock's methodology, which appears solid, but in his initial assumptions. Working from these assumptions, Pinnock's reasoning is mostly consistent and logical, but because he starts on the wrong path, all that he does is to continue, logically and reasonably, down the same wrong path.¹⁵¹

Pinnock's Pneumatology will be evaluated along three main lines, those taken from Pinnock's argumentation.

3.2.1 The Sacred and Secular Split

As noted earlier, Pinnock concludes that, because God is omnipresent, his Spirit must be *soteriologically* at work everywhere as well. However, this conclusion is questionable. Just because the Spirit is present everywhere, this does not mean that the Spirit is working in the heart of each and every person to bring that person to salvation.

Pinnock does not seem to make the necessary distinction between simple presence and soteriological presence. In other words, just because God is present, this does not mean he is necessarily exercising his saving grace there. The existence of hell would seem to necessitate such a delineation between the simple presence of God and his soteriological presence.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ As Calvin rightly notes, "For the more strenuously anyone runs who is off the path, the farther he gets from his goal, and the more pitiable he therefore becomes" (*Institutes*, 3.14.4).

¹⁵² "What then is the single greatest factor that makes hell to be hell? The answer is *the presence of God*" (John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* [Durham, NC: Evangelical Press, 1993] 159, emphasis original).

Pneumatologically, the same could be said concerning the distinction between believers and non-believers. The Holy Spirit indwells believers, but given the omnipresence of God and his Spirit, one might be tempted to make the false conclusion that the Holy Spirit also indwells unbelievers. Similarly, when Jesus says, “Whenever two or more of you are gathered in my name, there am I in your midst” (Matt. 18:20), is this not redundant because God is everywhere? When two or more Satanists are gathered, is not God present there as well? Given his omnipresence, of course God is present there.¹⁵³

Thus is the fallacy of not making a distinction between the general presence of God, and his special presence. Jesus is present in some special manner when believers are gathered in his name, even though, given his deity, he is present everywhere at all times anyway. The same can be said concerning God’s Spirit. Certainly the Holy Spirit is present everywhere, but should evangelicals really conclude that he is working in the hearts of Satanists when they meet for worship? How about Buddhists? Muslims? At what point is the line drawn?¹⁵⁴

The same could be said about Pinnock’s statement, “We refuse to allow the disjunction between . . . common and saving grace” (Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 98). Traditionally, common grace has been thought of as that grace which God shows equally to all people, while saving grace is that special grace which brings people to salvation.¹⁵⁵ It is this distinction that actually serves as a safeguard from believing that only a portion of God’s creation experiences his grace, while the rest experiences absolutely none of it. It also serves as a balancing factor when it comes to the sin and depravity of humankind. Without the common grace of God, humanity would move much more quickly into the downward spiral of degeneration.

If Pinnock sees no “disjunction” between common and saving grace, the assumption is he means he sees no basic difference between them. This may in fact be part and parcel of his disdain for any Calvinist definition of election, because in such a definition, God is seen as treating people differently. For Pinnock, who is strongly influenced by Arminian theology, such discrimination by God cannot be tolerated. No doubt this goes hand-in-hand with

However, most inclusivists alter the traditional view of hell as a place of everlasting, conscious torment (see the section on Soteriology).

¹⁵³ Pinnock’s view of the presence and role of the Holy Spirit also implies that there is no special difference between the Spirit’s presence in the Body of Christ, the Church, and in the world in general.

¹⁵⁴ Pinnock argues for criteria by which Christians can judge where to draw the line (*Flame*, 208-211), but it appears that his criteria boil down to finding good works and moral attitudes in people of other faiths. More will be mentioned concerning this fact when analysing the category of pagan saints.

¹⁵⁵ “Special grace is the grace by which God redeems, sanctifies, and glorifies his people. Unlike common grace, which is universally given, special grace is bestowed only on those whom God elects to eternal life through faith in his Son, our Savior Jesus Christ” (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Walter Elwell, ed., second edition [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001] 520).

Pinnock's assertion that the Holy Spirit "knocks on every human heart." If the Spirit chose to *not* knock on just one heart, but to allow it to remain as it were, this sort of discrimination (election, in essence) is wholly objectionable according to Pinnock and his inclusivist kin.

But just as a distinction must be made between God's simple or general presence, based on his attribute of omnipresence, and his special or soteriological presence, so too must a distinction be made between common grace and saving grace. Simply put, God does not treat all people the same way. To conclude otherwise would be to flatly ignore the clear facts of history, let alone the biblical data. For example, Israel, as God's chosen people, was given special treatment from all other nations around her. She was shown a special grace which none of the other nations could claim. If not, it would make little sense to call Israel God's "chosen" nation.¹⁵⁶

The same can be said on an individual basis. Abraham, out of all the people who inhabited Ur of the Chaldees, was given special revelation by God to move to a new land. He was treated wholly differently than others around him. The same can be said about many others in Scripture, such as Noah, whom God chose to preserve through the Great Flood. God did not come to others and tell them to build an ark too. And why was Noah commanded to build an ark? So that he and his family could be saved. In essence, then, God did not give others during the time of Noah the opportunity for equal salvation.¹⁵⁷

3.2.2 Inclusivism and non-Christian Religions

The positive view of non-Christian religions found in inclusivism is decidedly different than that traditionally espoused by evangelicals. For one thing, much of the modern missionary movement has been fuelled by the belief that if people did not hear the gospel, they would be lost. In other words, their religious faith and traditions were soteriologically worthless apart from a knowledge of Christ. To find evangelical inclusivists, then, who not only do not view

¹⁵⁶ Pinnock glosses over this point (*Flame*, 83, 200, 217) in his misuse of Amos 9:7. Pinnock evidently reads this passage to mean that there was no soteriological difference between Israel and the nations around her, hardly a proper interpretation of this passage given the entire Old Testament context.

¹⁵⁷ It should be noted that some translations call Noah a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). This may intimate that, while Noah was building the ark for what most believe to be 120 years (Gen. 6:3), he preached a message of impending doom to his contemporaries, who obviously ignored his warnings. However, some translations call Noah a "herald of righteousness" (eg., ESV) and as such, a herald need not actually speak or preach, but could merely "declare" via his actions (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 481-482). The author of Hebrews says that Noah in building the ark "by this . . . condemned the world" (Heb. 11:7). He mentions nothing about Noah preaching, but rather intimates that by the action of building the ark, Noah was condemning his generation and its godlessness. This would also make better sense of Jesus' comment about the flood victims who "knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away" (Matt. 24:39). But whether or not Noah preached, the original point still remains: God only came to Noah about building an ark. He did not equally approach each and every other individual and tell them to build an ark too.

non-Christian religions negatively, but even positively believe they can contribute to an individual's salvation, is to find an anomaly in evangelicalism. As positive as this view is, it must be made certain that it is biblical and not simply a modern creation. Put another way, it should be done what Pinnock himself wants as noted earlier, to allow God to speak for himself on these matters, and to not put words in his mouth.

However, there exists a seeming confusion on the part of evangelical inclusivists when it comes to other religious traditions. Pinnock disagrees with Rahner's optimistic and highly positive view of other faiths, but this disagreement seems short-lived when one considers how positively Pinnock also views these religions.

Exclusivists rightly see little difference in saying that adherents of non-Christian religions experience the divine presence of God, that the Holy Spirit is present in them, and that elements of grace are experienced via them (as evangelical inclusivists say), versus saying that non-Christian religions are salvific (as pluralists and Catholic inclusivists say). Pinnock, for example, cannot have it both ways. He cannot say there is no disjunction between common and special grace, and then claim that non-Christian religions which have elements of grace are not salvific. Similarly, he cannot say there is no divergence between secular and sacred when it comes to the work of the Spirit, and then object that other inclusivists conclude that the Spirit works salvifically in non-Christian faiths. Couple this with inclusivism's claim that explicit knowledge of Christ is not even necessary, and it is no wonder that many exclusivists see little practical difference between pluralism's positive view of non-Christian religions and that of evangelical inclusivists.

In Pinnock's evaluation of non-Christian traditions, he uses two main criteria in testing these traditions: does the adherent fear God, and is this person pursuing righteousness? Pinnock then concludes that if these two criteria are present, the person is on the road to salvation. Along the lines of C. S. Lewis and others, he reasons that the positive aspects of any religious tradition can potentially be used by God to draw people into a salvific relationship of grace with him, despite the contradictions that may exist between that religious tradition and the tenets of the Christian faith.

Pinnock argues that the "interpretive lens" for determining such matters is Jesus Christ, and exclusivists heartily agree. However, this interpretive lens comes through the work of the Holy Spirit, who inspired God's holy Word with the express intention of pointing to Christ. Clearly, the interpretive lens should be Jesus Christ, but that means that those religions which do not honour Christ cannot be seen as part of the work of the Spirit, anymore than the worship of Baal or Molech could have been seen as a "taster" for the worship of Jehovah.

As noted earlier, Pinnock states: “The same rule would apply to Africans who recognize a high God, a God who sees all, gives gifts to all, who is unchangeable and wise” (*Wideness*, 96-97). But it is not obvious that just because an African believes in a Creator of the world, that he de facto is worshiping the God of Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁸ There is much more needed before one could conclude such a thing.¹⁵⁹ Much of African Traditional Religions posit what amounts to the God of Deism, a distant, aloof Being who does not bother himself with his creation. That is left to the ancestral spirits as the mediators between the physical and spiritual realms. In short, just because a person claims to believe in a Supreme Being, this does not mean that person is worshiping the God of the Bible.¹⁶⁰ Pinnock seems to forget that humans constantly create God in their own image, regardless of whether or not they call him the creator and assign monotheism to their belief system.¹⁶¹

Perhaps Pinnock would prefer to comment on something closer to home, Christian cults such as Mormonism or the Jehovah’s Witnesses for example? They claim to believe in a Creator as well. Is Pinnock comfortable in concluding similarly, that such adherents in Christian cults can be thought of as worshiping the one, true God? Or do they not rather construct their own god and worship him instead? Both can fairly be considered to “fear God” and to pursue righteousness.¹⁶²

The overwhelming evidence from Scripture is exactly the opposite, that God disdains these human-made religions as false and idolatrous. There is God’s way, and all other ways. Even in the case of Israel, God was not pleased with all of them, and they sat in a privileged position of having the special revelation of God revealed through the Law. This idea that positive elements of a non-Christian religion can be concentrated on for their salvific benefit

¹⁵⁸ In fact, could the same thing not be said about Egypt and Babylonia in the Old Testament times? They also had beliefs in one, supreme creator, yet their religions were consistently condemned by Jehovah.

¹⁵⁹ Further, it is by no means clear that belief in a supreme God existed in African Traditional Religions before their contact with the monotheism of Christianity and Islam.

¹⁶⁰ Another matter as to *how* one should worship this Creator must also come into play. “It would be a tragic mistake to think that people can seek God in any way that they choose or worship him in just any manner. Nothing could be more false” (Daniel Clendenin, 1995:157). In Africa, the belief that some have in one Creator leads them to various forms of idolatry, not unlike the pagan religions in Canaan during the Old Testament Israelite occupation.

¹⁶¹ In an introductory course I teach on Apologetics, we note that theistic claims for the existence of God only prove that an “Unmoved Mover” or “Moral Guarantor” exists, but that such proofs do not as such prove the existence of the *Christian* God. Is this Unmoved Mover a conscious being? Is he finite or infinite? Does he even involve himself with his creation? Is he singular or plural? So many questions remain open for debate, and the ultimate Christian apologetic will be found in the revelation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is simply not good enough to conclude that because someone believes in a Creator, that person must believe in the God of Jesus Christ.

¹⁶² In fact, with their belief in the potential for every man to become a god of his own planet, Mormonism espouses a subtle polytheism in its theology. They may speak about “one” God, but he is only the god of this planet earth. There are other planets with other gods.

appears biblically questionable. Rather, the Bible consistently proclaims that if a person professes faith in someone other than Christ, that person is lost.

3.2.3 Biblical References to Religions outside the Judeo-Christian Tradition

There is a familiar analogy often used by pluralists (and to a lesser extent inclusivists) when discussing world religions and the nature of God. It involves a king who has placed an elephant in a room with five blind men. Each man is given the task of determining what he is investigating, through the sense of touch.

As one man gropes around the side of the beast, he feels a large panel of rough skin and coarse hair. Another investigates the tail and backside, while a third the tusks. Each man will have his own perspective as to what constitutes an elephant, and all are partially right and partially wrong. If one of the blind men is dogmatic that the essence of an elephant is *only* to be found in having large ears, the pluralists says he is acting like an exclusivist.

The point of the analogy is clear. Humanity, in its attempt to discern God and his nature, is only seeing part of the picture. Each religious tradition has some perspective on the elephant, albeit an incomplete one. What needs to be done is to humbly recognise the limitations of one's own religious tradition and be open to learning from the traditions of others. Conversely, anyone who says their religious tradition embodies all of the truth is like the blind man who clutches a leg and thinks he has grasped the whole elephant.

This is quite an appealing analogy, but how valid is it? In the analogy, the king is the only person who knows entirely what the whole elephant looks like, which implies that there *is* an elephant. In other words, there is an objective truth which constitutes the elephant. Certainly, someone who only apprehends the trunk still knows, at least in part, what constitutes an elephant. But if one of the blind men were to say that he feels smooth skin, or determines that the beast stands upright on two legs, would he be talking about the same elephant?

Much is made by pluralists and inclusivists about the good qualities of the non-Christian faiths. John Hick, for example, goes through great detail in proving his point that all of the great world religions basically boil down to the same, common characteristics, hopes, and morals.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ See *A Christian Theology of Religions* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) and *God Has Many Names* (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1980), the latter in which Hick approvingly quotes the Bhagavad Gita, IV, 11: "Howsoever men may approach me, ever so do I accept them; for, on all sides, whatever path they may choose is mine" (58). In *A Christian Theology* he agrees with Mahatma Gandhi: "We are all children of the same God" (34).

“There is but one God, who is maker and lord of all; that in his infinite fullness and richness of being he exceeds all our human attempts to grasp him in thought; and that the devout in the various great world religions are in fact worshipping that one God, but through different, overlapping concepts or mental icons of him” (*God Has Many Names*, 48-49).

Inclusivists do not agree with the distillation of all religions down to common elements, but they do agree in principle that God can use those religions to draw people to himself, as noted previously in greater detail. The common mistake both the pluralist and inclusivist make is to only concentrate on those elements in the religions which are in common, or those elements in non-Christian religions which reflect Christian principles and practises, but is this a sound methodology? Should the differences not also be considered?¹⁶⁴

If a BMW and a Volkswagen Beetle were to stand side-by-side, is justice done to the superiority of the BMW by simply boiling down both vehicles to each having four tyres, a steering wheel, and an internal combustion engine? Is it not the differences between the two which allow one to obtain a hefty price tag, while the other not?¹⁶⁵

Lists can be made of the similarities between Islam and Christianity, for example, and claim that they are saying much the same thing, but only if the weighty matters of Trinity and incarnation, atonement and resurrection are ignored.¹⁶⁶ Judaism and Christianity have much in common, but the Apostle Paul, who converted from the former to the latter, considered his previous ways “dung” (Phil. 3:8) in comparison to his life in Christ.¹⁶⁷ If there is biblical

¹⁶⁴ Martin Goldsmith (*What about Other Faiths?* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989) summarises the views of pluralist Paul Knitter in determining what the attitude should be toward non-Christian religions (103-106). Knitter sees three main attitudes which compete with exclusivism in churches today. 1) All religions are relative (Knitter uses Ernst Troeltsch as his case study), 2) All religions are essentially the same (using Arnold Toynbee as his example), and 3) All religions share a common psychological origin (using the work of Swiss psychologist Carl Jung).

¹⁶⁵ Christianity is unique in its teaching concerning the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus, and in its doctrine of sin and its effect and cure. The Christian Scriptures are also unique in their teaching concerning something as fundamental as the existence of the universe, time, and space (J. P. Moreland, ed., *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994] 153).

¹⁶⁶ After his evaluation of the differences between Islam and Christianity, Hendrik Kraemer notes, “the hypothesis of an identical final goal is precarious in the extreme” (*Why Christianity of All Religions* [London: Lutterworth Press, 1962] 62). In fact, the greatest sin in Islam, *shirk*, is precisely what the doctrine of the Trinity teaches.

¹⁶⁷ The large amount of commonality between Judaism and Christianity is obvious, especially when it comes to the attributes of God and the ethics of his people. The crucial and perhaps only difference of importance is found in the person of Jesus. This is the case when comparing Christianity to all other religions as well. As Kraemer observes, the central issue of Christianity “is neither a doctrine nor a principle. It is the Person of Jesus Christ” (*Why Christianity*, 72). However, see pluralist John B. Cobb, Jr., who believes that a synthesis between Islam and Christianity is possible (*Postmodernism and Public Policy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002). “Trinitarian thought, also, need not involve truth claims that contradict the faithful Jewish and Muslim affirmations of God’s unity” (37). Cobb argues elsewhere that Buddhism and Christianity can also be synthesised, in *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*

support for the need for conversion from Judaism to Christianity, should the same not be expected when moving from a religion considerably different from that founded by Christ?

The fate of those who have not heard the gospel is no small issue in contemporary evangelical debates.¹⁶⁸ However, rather than being moved by emotional arguments, evangelicals need to be convinced by Scripture. Back to the analogy of the elephant, those who claim to perceive a beast with smooth skin and two legs are not studying an elephant, but some other creature. Should the possibility not also be considered that non-Christian religions are human-made inventions, innovations developed by sinful humans who do not want to submit to the one true God? Are exclusivists really wrong when they read the Bible as if it condemns and judges other religions outside the Judeo-Christian tradition?

The following study is by no means exhaustive, but it will hopefully shed some light on the disagreement between inclusivists and exclusivists on the role of non-Christian religions. A detailed analysis of each and every piece of data cannot be performed, but only brief comments will be given as the need arises. Scripture is certainly not ignorant of religions outside its self-profession of faith in Jehovah, and there is much to work with on this score.

The natural place to begin is in the Old Testament and the Garden of Eden. The Serpent in the Garden is paradigmatic of evil opposition to the Creator. By twisting the words of God (Gen. 3:1-5) he is able to deceive Eve and then Adam. Paul's comment in 2 Cor. 4:4 that unbelievers are blinded by the "god of this age" reflects the age-old battle. Spiritual forces are at work (Eph. 6:12), and evangelicals would be negligent if they did not attempt to recognise their activity even in the religious sphere.

Early in the Genesis account Abel's unfaithful brother Cain is introduced (Gen. 4), who becomes a type of all those who take a path contrary to God's prescribed course (1 Jn. 3:12;

(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), and along with Christopher Ives (eds.), that the two can find common ground with Judaism, in *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991). Raimundo Panikkar, in *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1981), attempts to bring the Christian concept of Christ and the Hindu concept of Ishvara together, in what amounts to a pluralistic reconstruction of the two religions, looking for a "functional equivalence." "A Christian will not fully understand Hinduism if he is not, in one way or another, converted to Hinduism. Nor will a Hindu ever fully understand Christianity unless he, in one way or another, becomes a Christian" (43).

¹⁶⁸ "In large measure the future of evangelical theology and world missions will be shaped by its outcome" (introductory comments by the editors, Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 12). However, we must not think that this issue is new. Consider the following comment by Sebastian Franck, a sixteenth-century Spiritualist: "Consider as thy brothers all Turks and heathen, wherever they be, who fear God and work righteousness, instructed by God and inwardly drawn by him, even though they have never heard of baptism, indeed, of Christ himself, neither of his story or scripture, but only of his power through the inner Word perceived within and made fruitful. . . . I hold that just as there are many Adams who do not know there was one Adam, so also there are many Christians who have never heard Christ's name," quoted in Williams, George H. and Mergal, Angel, M. (eds.), *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957) 156. St. Augustine also records that the third-century critic of Christianity, Porphyry (d. 304), used the fate of the unevangelised as a point against the religion of Christ in his fifteen-volume diatribe.

Jude 11; Heb. 11:4). The Flood during Noah's time speaks volumes concerning God's judgment, in this case falling upon the entire world and only preserving eight people. At bare minimum it speaks against the notion that God must save the vast majority of humanity in order to be considered fair and loving, something Pinnock and others echo when speaking against the "fewness doctrine" (*Wideness*, 17, 19, 186). The Tower of Babel incident (Gen. 11:1-9) also bespeaks a judgment against religious arrogance. Many commentators on the ten plagues on Egypt at the time of Moses note that these plagues served a double purpose: to move Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, and to condemn the false gods of Egypt.¹⁶⁹

Substantial ground concerning pagan saints will be dealt with shortly and need not be repeated here. However, it should be noted that God's command to wipe out entire peoples in Canaan should cause some hesitation to praise Canaanite religion. It seems that God's design was to protect his chosen people from the despicable practises and gods of the Canaanite peoples, but the Israelites disobeyed him and did not drive out all the people from the Promised Land (Jdgs. 2:1-3). The entire book of Judges is an account of the Israelites consistently falling into the worship of the false Canaanite gods.¹⁷⁰

It should be noted further that not only was the *who* of Jewish religious practise prescribed by God, but so too the *how*. This serves the double purpose of condemning all other gods, while also condemning all other religious practises. The Jews consistently attempted to incorporate the religious practises of the peoples around them into their Judaism, but God was never pleased with this. In a fascinating biblical example of syncretism (2 Kgs. 17), comes this enigmatic statement: "Even while these people were worshipping the LORD, they were serving their idols" (vs. 41; cf. vs. 33). This shows that religious practise cannot be divorced from religious content, and seems to speak against the inclusivist notion that in non-Christian religions God is using their positive elements to draw people to himself. From the golden calf in the desert onward, God vehemently opposed *any* incorporation of the pagan practises of the religions around Israel into her true worship of Yahweh.

¹⁶⁹ See Ex. 12:12, also Alan R. Cole, *Exodus: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1973) 108.

¹⁷⁰ One could argue that the sin of the Israelites was not so much worshipping Molech or Ashtoreth or Baal as it was forsaking Jehovah. In other words, worshipping these other gods was quite acceptable as far as the Canaanites were concerned, but not acceptable for a people who had a covenant with Jehovah to only serve him. This argument, while tempting, fails to take seriously the fact that God consistently judges not only his chosen people, but the peoples around them as well, for their idolatry and false ways. Again, destroying entire cities and tribes cannot be ignored when making a determination about God's view of the religions outside Judaism. Rahab stands as an example of a person who professed faith in Jehovah and was saved, while her entire city crumbled to the ground. It is difficult at best to read anything positive out of the story of Jericho when it comes to the religious traditions of its inhabitants.

Two further interactions between Jehovah and the gods of the pagan nations provide more insight. First Samuel 4 records the Philistine capture of the ark of the covenant. The Philistines moved the ark to Ashdod, where they placed it in the temple of Dagon, the chief Philistine deity (ch. 5). They later found the statue of Dagon falling prostrate before the ark, with its hands and head broken off from the torso. Clearly this is portrayed by the author as a judgment by God.¹⁷¹

The second incident involves the commander of the army of the king of Aram, Naaman, who was healed of leprosy by the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs. 5). Naaman asks to be forgiven for a seeming religious indiscretion, namely, that when he returns home to his master and worships in the temple, as his king leans on his arm to bow down, Naaman must also do so (vs. 18). Naaman's request for grace only makes sense within the context of God's condemnation of the religion of Aram, not his approval of it.

The remainder of Old Testament history until the Babylonian captivity is one long chronicle of disobedience by God's people, a religious disobedience that a jealous God could not stomach. Even someone as great as King Solomon was not immune to it, being led astray by his numerous foreign wives to follow false gods (1 Kgs. 11). The account of Elijah on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs. 18) proves the impotence of the false gods of non-Jewish peoples.¹⁷² It can hardly be understood in an inclusivist manner, namely, that God was using the worship of Baal to actually draw people to himself. Rather, it is the entire condemnation of Baal worship and the extermination of its 450 prophets that speaks judgment, not a hopeful optimism that God really does approve of these religions. Later, Elijah is reminded that God has reserved for himself "seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal" (1 Kgs. 19:18). It seems that even within the community of God's chosen people, only a relative few had not committed apostasy.

During the exile in Babylon, there are numerous instances where Jehovah was proven the one true God to the exclusion of all others. The accounts of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:28-37) and Daniel in the lion's den (Dan. 6) not only serve as examples of God's faithfulness to his chosen people, but also serve to condemn the gods of the nations around Israel.

The inclusivist has quite a dilemma when faced with the above data. Attempting to conclude that God did not condemn the religions and religious practises of the nations

¹⁷¹ This interpretation makes sense within the context of the Old Testament and in light of such clear statements as 1 Chr. 16:26: "For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens." "'Idolatry' is the term the Bible uses to label any system of ideas or practices that trades divine truth for a false alternative (see Rom. 1:22-25; 1 Cor. 8:4-7; 1 Jn. 5:19-21)" (Geivett/Phillips in *Four Views*, 134).

¹⁷² In Jonah 1:5, there is another example where the gods of the nations outside Israel are portrayed as impotent when compared to Jehovah.

surrounding Israel, in light of the plethora of information to the contrary, but that he instead looked upon them as means of grace or even salvific, is quite a tall order. At least as concerns the Old Testament biblical data, keeping in mind that an evaluation of the category of pagan saints is yet to come, the exclusivist position appears for the moment to be more tenable than that of the inclusivist.

When coming to the New Testament, there is not find nearly the same amount of interaction with religions outside the Judeo-Christian tradition as found in the Old Testament, but there is enough to examine nonetheless.

The book of Acts is often the first place inclusivists go when looking to defend their positive view of non-Christian religions. It was already noted the prominent role that the conversion of Cornelius plays in this regard, but Paul's encounter with the Athenians in Acts 17 is also one of the key texts used by inclusivists. Pinnock sees in Paul's Athenian speech an explicit connection between Greek worship and the knowledge of the true God. "God is drawing the nations, and religions supply occasions when people can respond to him" (*Flame*, 201). McDermott affirms the same conviction, that God's revelation has not been limited solely to the Judeo-Christian sphere, but has been mediated also by "non-Christian and non-Jewish *faith communities* (religions)." ¹⁷³

Clearly, Paul used the religious context of the Athenians in order to introduce the gospel, but this does not necessarily mean that Paul believed that their religious traditions were in some way salvific or a means of salvation. If this had been the case, perhaps Paul could have ended his speech without reference to Jesus. In fact, it is only once he referred to the resurrection of the crucified Jew that most of the Athenians quickly lost interest (vss. 31-33).

Paul's speech contained a clear condemnation of idolatry, which formed the heart of the Athenian worship (vs. 29-30). It also contained a strongly exclusivist statement about Jesus: "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (vs. 31). Thus it is wiser to conclude from Acts 17 that Paul is not commending the religions of the Athenians, but is rather countering their false notions with the truth found only in Christ. That he uses their religious traditions as a springboard for introducing the gospel should not be misconstrued as approval of their religious traditions.

Two chapters later Paul's experiences in the city of Ephesus are recounted, the heart of pagan worship in Asia Minor and the home of the Temple of Artemis. Luke's portrayal of the

¹⁷³ Gerald R. McDermott, 2000:110-111, emphasis original.

events in Ephesus sets up a “power encounter” between those who worshiped Artemis and her image, and those who would see Christ proclaimed. The burning of the elements of sorcery (vs. 19) and the ensuing riot all point to a disjuncture between Christian faith and the religious traditions of the Ephesians, not a semblance or continuity between them. Paul’s message is portrayed as one of animosity toward those religious traditions, not acceptance (“He says that man-made gods are no gods at all,” vs. 26b).

In fact, whereas inclusivists find much support for their position in Acts 17, they are virtually silent on Acts 19. This is surprising, since there are great similarities between the religious traditions of the Athenians and the Ephesians. The events in Ephesus must also be studied along with Paul’s comments in his Ephesian epistle. There he notes that apart from Christ, people are dead in their sins and following the ways of Satan (2:1-2), “without hope and without God in the world” (2:12). This rather bald statement should be taken at face value, as opposed to attempting to read things into narratives such as Acts 17 and coming away with more positivistic interpretations.

John’s closing prohibition in his first epistle (“Dear children, keep yourselves from idols,” 5:21), should be understood in the whole context of the view of idols in the New Testament writings. Prohibitions against idolatry could very well exclude every other religion throughout the Roman Empire save for Judaism. In fact, Paul can speak in very broad terms about the sacrifices of pagans as “offered to demons” (1 Cor. 10:20). He can also refer to “things taught by demons” (1 Tim. 4:1), and it is not difficult to see the two statements as aspects of the same reality. When Paul warns that Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), could it not also be rightly concluded that this can involve the religious sphere? In what other area would this make sense, if not in the area of the religious?

Lastly, if any religious tradition outside of Christianity could be said to enjoy the favour of God, Judaism would certainly have to be near or at the top of that list. Yet, Jews like the Apostle Paul, Pharisees such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, and all of the disciples of Jesus found it necessary to depart from the Jewish religious tradition. For example, there would have been no need for Peter’s Pentecostal speech of Acts 2, nor the conversion of 3000 Jews, had Judaism in and of itself been an adequate expression of faith in God. The fact that adherents to the Old Testament religious revelation needed to convert to the Christian faith speaks volumes, and should cause circumspection when evaluating religious traditions further down the spectrum from Christianity. Recalling the issue of pagan saints, there would have been no need for Peter to bring the gospel to Cornelius, for example, had he already possessed

salvation. This stands to reason if even the Jewish faithful needed to change religious adherence.

Given the entire breadth and tenor of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, there appears little warrant to maintain that religions outside of the Jewish and Christian traditions are positively viewed by God. The pluralist's contention that they are indeed salvific simply lacks any biblical basis whatsoever, but even the evangelical inclusivist's conviction that God positively uses them to draw people to himself (or to Christ) appears unfounded.¹⁷⁴ The exclusivist position, namely, that non-Christian religions are "false" religions and draw people away from the one, true God, not only has historical precedence in its favour, but the biblical data also seems to favour it as well.¹⁷⁵

3.2.4 The Examples of Pagan Saints

The third thrust of Pinnock's Pneumatology involves pagan saints. Evangelical inclusivists appeal to Scripture as God's Word. It is God-breathed and as such, it can be fully trusted, or to put it another way, trusted fully. Fellow evangelicals need not waste time bickering over this or that statement of Jesus as authentic or inauthentic, for example, because they believe the Word to be fully from God.

So then, given this important, common ground, how can evangelicals find themselves at odds with each other on such a vital issue as the extent of the atoning work of Christ? Or more specifically, how can an exclusivist view Christ's atoning work, particularly when it comes to the existence and efficacy of other world religions, in such a negative light, while the inclusivist can be so positive and hopeful? Is the Bible so unclear as to leave an unbridgeable and unexplainable gap as this?

God's Spirit can do anything he chooses to do, a confession which flows from the belief that God is the omnipotent, sovereign Lord over all. However, if an *a priori* supposition which excludes a hermeneutic of judgment is used, will this not consequently create a more

¹⁷⁴ To be fair, Pinnock does indeed recognise religion's "bad side" (*Wideness*, 88-89), but he still maintains a positive view of religious traditions in general, something that Scripture seems to not support.

¹⁷⁵ This study has been concentrating on those individuals who have a religious tradition, but estimates of world demographics place atheists and a-religious people at nearly 20% of the population (see www.adherents.com). As noted earlier, Pinnock approves of the Catholic notion that even an atheist can ultimately be saved without ever professing Christ. But the Psalmist says plainly, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" (Ps. 14:1). Nowhere in all the Wisdom literature can one positive statement about a fool be found, unless it is said sarcastically (such as in Ecclesiastes). A fool is a person who is morally deficient (see *NIV Study Bible* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985] footnote for Psalm 14:1), and as such, it is a contradiction in terms to speak of a holy pagan atheist. Such designations are biblically incoherent.

positive feeling toward other faiths? To put this another way, a Spirit who negatively judges a large portion of humanity will not be tolerated any more than will a Jesus who does similarly.

The entire openness that inclusivists believe God has for non-Christian religions is founded on their biblical exposition of pagan saints. A close look at their treatment of this category is needed to see if there is any validity to the inclusivist claims. The four pagan saints used when evaluating inclusivist comments on the subject will be considered.

Job. Pinnock refers to Job as “. . . a pagan believer . . . who had a good will and put his trust in God even though inadequately informed doctrinally and morally.” This is a fairly incredible statement about Job given what God himself said about the man. “There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (Job 1:8). Pinnock further notes, “A person who is informationally premessianic, whether living in ancient or modern times, is in the exact same spiritual situation” (*Wideness*, 160). This is an equally incredible statement, again given what God said about Job. Does Professor Pinnock honestly believe that “pagan saints” today could be spoken of in the same way as God spoke about Job?

Putting that question aside for the moment, it is not clear how Job got to where he was spiritually. The nature of the revelation he received from God is not given in the text, although he does say at the end of the book, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5), so perhaps he had faith by hearing, as Paul says faith can come (Rom. 10:17). Job had heard of the one, true God and had devoted his life to serving him. This is nothing different than sharing the gospel about Jesus and someone reacting similarly. Job did not come to his conclusions about Jehovah by looking at a tree or river, or through casting an idol, but in some way came to faith in Jehovah because of what he heard about him. Whatever the actual case, it is a wild conclusion to make that “holy pagans” today are in the “same spiritual situation” as was Job.

Nash makes a similar point when he asks: “How can Old Testament believers who had a significant relationship to special revelation and whose faith was tied to symbols and practices that looked forward to Christ provide warrant for treating unevangelized moderns as saved believers?” (1994:127). Simply put, the inclusivist argument that Old Testament pagan saints are in the same spiritual situation as people today who have yet to hear about Jesus is an untenable argument.

Melchizedek. That Melchizedek is a mysterious personage in the Bible cannot be denied. The comments that the author of the Book of Hebrews makes about him can come only from

divine inspiration. His conclusions are not readily made otherwise.¹⁷⁶ However, to conclude from Melchizedek that readers must appreciate Canaanite religion is too much to ask, especially considering how God dealt with the Canaanites.¹⁷⁷

Further, there is less information about Melchizedek's interaction with Jehovah than with Job. For example, the text does not state how Melchizedek came to become a priest, or how he encountered Yahweh previously. Pinnock's first point that there are genuine believers in nations outside of Israel is not denied, but in most biblical instances of such, those people came to faith in Yahweh because they heard about him, not via their pagan culture and religion.¹⁷⁸ No matter how much Richardson makes of the "Melchizedek factor," Scripture is silent on how Melchizedek came to know Yahweh, and arguing from this silence is dangerous, especially if it yields conclusions which are at odds with the overall tenor of Scripture when it comes to how people come to faith in God.

If God wanted to show that there are "positive contributions to be appreciated from non-Israelite religion and culture," it seems hardly instructive to command the Israelites to wipe out all those people. Why, if the pagan Canaanite religions were so helpful in drawing men to God, did God consistently object when the Israelites attempted to incorporate Canaanite culture and religious practise into their worship? "The tragedies of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities are specifically attributed to Israel's idolatrous perversions (2 Kings 17; 2 Chr. 28:22-23; 36:11-21)" (Clendenin, 1995:130). Canaanite religion in the Old Testament is consistently and unequivocally represented and regarded as reprehensible in the eyes of Yahweh, not instructive and to be appreciated.

Abimelech. Pinnock comments that the example of Abimelech, "proves beyond any doubt that the fear of the Lord may occur in the hearts of people who live far beyond Israel's borders" (*Wideness*, 94), but this is not the point to which exclusivists object when it comes to the examples of holy pagans in the Old Testament. That God is interested in all peoples is not questioned. His promise to Abraham stated that he would be a blessing to all nations (Gen. 12:3), and the picture in Revelation of people from "every tribe and language and people and

¹⁷⁶ Concerning who exactly Melchizedek was, some scholars have concluded that he was either a theophany, a pre-existent being, or a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ (Nash, *Jesus Only Savior?*, 128, and Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1989) 157.

¹⁷⁷ Clendenin refers to God's merciless dealing with the Canaanite people as evidence of the "particularity of God's self-revelation" (1995:129).

¹⁷⁸ Nash makes the point that Melchizedek should not even be labelled a "pagan." "Melchizedek worshiped and served Yahweh as certainly as Abram did. Melchizedek fails as an example of genuine piety among pagans" (1994:128).

nation” (5:9; 7:9; 14:6) worshiping God and the Lamb is a sure sign that this promise will be fulfilled.¹⁷⁹

In the case of Abimelech, Genesis 20 says that God came to Abimelech in a dream, therefore establishing direct contact with the king. Abimelech was not led to belief in God through his pagan religion, and the passage says nothing of the sort. In fact, at the end of the story it says that Abraham prayed to God so that Abimelech could be healed (20:17). This hardly portrays Abimelech as a devout follower of Jehovah, and in fact may point to a deficiency on the part of Abimelech’s religion in approaching Jehovah, as it was necessary for Abraham to intercede for him.

Cornelius. The example of Cornelius is the most important, because it involves a post-Easter individual. Acts 10:2 states that Cornelius “and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.” The obvious question in all of this is how did Cornelius come to be a God-fearer in the first place? Was it through the mystery cults, or State religion, or the worship of the Roman gods or some other pagan system? Or was it more plausibly through contact with Jews and coming to recognise that their God was the one, true God? Scripture does not specify, but from elsewhere in the Book of Acts it can see how Luke uses this term, “God-fearing.”

In Acts 2:5, it is used of Jews who have come to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost. In 13:26, it is used of Gentiles who have come to the synagogue, obviously attracted to the teachings of Judaism. In fact, it is used twice more in a similar context (17:4, 17), when Paul went to Thessalonica and to Athens and again, both times while in a synagogue, “God-fearing Greeks” were present.¹⁸⁰ The pattern is unmistakable. Luke uses this term almost exclusively when he refers to people who have come into contact with Judaism and its teachings about God, but who have yet to convert fully to Judaism. In Acts 13:43 he speaks of “devout converts to Judaism.” From this it may be concluded, along with the *NIV Study Bible*, that “God-fearing” refers to “one who was not a full Jewish proselyte but who believed in one God and respected the moral and ethical teachings of the Jews” (footnote, Acts 10:2).

It is best to allow the author of Acts to state how the term should be understood, and not to jump to false conclusions about it as inclusivists seem to do. Cornelius came to fear God because of his contact with the teachings of Judaism. The same could be said about Peter, Paul, and the rest of the apostles. Their understanding of God did not come from paganism,

¹⁷⁹ It should be noted in these pictures in Revelation that not “every person” is there, but people from every tribe, nation, language, and people is noted. It is a representative redemption, not a universal one.

¹⁸⁰ The only other usage of the term is found in Acts 13:50, referring to “God-fearing women of high standing” who helped in expelling Paul and Barnabas from the city.

but from contact with the teachings of Judaism. “God-fearers” frequently came to the synagogue to learn more about the God of the Jews, and Paul often encountered them there. However, if they decided to convert fully to the Jewish faith, Luke designates them differently as seen in Acts 13:43.

The example of Cornelius does not teach, therefore, that people can come to faith in the one true God through questionable religions. Instead, it teaches that people from all nations and all tribes can come to God when they come into contact with a religion which truly teaches about him. From the biblical record, that is limited to Judaism and Christianity.¹⁸¹

Pinnock notes: “Those like Cornelius, who have responded to God in pagan contexts will need to turn to Christ to receive what Jesus alone can give them: the Holy Spirit, a portion in the kingdom of God, and the experience of messianic salvation” (*Wideness*, 179). No bickering is necessary over whether or not a person who does not have the Holy Spirit, a portion in the kingdom of God, and the experience of messianic salvation can be properly considered to be saved, but one wonders why, if the pagan religions of people like Cornelius were so good, that they needed to come to Christ at all. Given the understanding of progressive revelation, evangelicals do not disagree that in Jesus Christ the fullness of the revelation of God has come.

However, Pinnock believes that Cornelius came to faith in his “pagan context.” If by saying this he only means that a pagan came to faith in Jesus, then that is no difficulty. Many people do. However, if Pinnock believes that it was *because* of his pagan context that Cornelius came to faith in the one, true God, and this can be suspected given Pinnock’s inclusivism, then he is just simply wrong. Cornelius serves as an example of someone who came to faith *despite* his paganism, because he had contact with God’s chosen people, the Jews, and their teaching.

The main point of Peter’s encounter with Cornelius, including the vision Peter had about the sheet with unclean food, was given by Luke near the conclusion of the story: “Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism, but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right’” (Acts 10:34-35). The lesson was given to Peter so that he would learn that God is not just the God of the Jews, but he is the God of all peoples. God does not show favouritism, he does not care about nationality or status. If a person has faith, that person will be accepted, whether they are a Jew or a Gentile.

¹⁸¹ The *NIV Study Bible* also sees a clue in 10:3 when it says that Cornelius prayed regularly and that a vision from God came to him “about three in the afternoon.” This was a Jewish hour of prayer, and could possibly serve as another proof that Cornelius followed Jewish religious practises.

These verses are often used by inclusivists to bolster their claim that explicit knowledge of Jesus is not necessary, only that an individual does what is morally right (eg., *Flame*, 180, 195, 202). But this fails to take into consideration the full context of the Cornelius episode, especially verse 43: “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” This is Peter’s conclusion to the Cornelius incident, and it is not surprising that, whereas Pinnock quotes verses 35-36 three times in his book, he does not reference verse 43 even once. The Cornelius account does not teach salvation for people who do not profess faith in Jesus but who are simply “God-fearing,” moral people. It teaches the exact opposite, namely, that salvation came to Cornelius via a profession of epistemological faith in Christ. What this story does not teach is that God respects pagan religions and uses them to draw people to Christ. Cornelius became a God-fearer because of his encounter with the God of Judaism. God heard his prayers, because Cornelius was praying to Jehovah (Acts 10:31). He was not on his knees praying to the Emperor, or Zeus, or Apollo, or Mithras. Cornelius was praying to Jehovah, the God of the Jews.

John Sanders similarly uses Cornelius in a wrong fashion when he states, “Peter and Paul came to the realization that there were Gentiles who worshiped the true God despite the fact that some of them had limited knowledge of the Old Testament while others remained completely without special revelation” (*Three Views*, 43). Concerning Cornelius, a few questions should help determine if Sanders’ conclusions are accurate. How much is known about Cornelius and his past? Did he become a God-fearer through the veneration of idols? How much prior contact did he have with the Jews and the revelation of the Torah and other Jewish Scriptures?

As already noted, when Luke refers to Cornelius as a “God-fearer” this is filled with content which makes it virtually certain that Cornelius did in fact have contact with the special revelation of God as found in the Jewish Scriptures. One gets the strong impression that inclusivists believe that the Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah could still, by sincerely striving for righteousness through the Law, be saved (see Race quotation on page 120 below for an example). How else can the account of Cornelius be understood as used by inclusivist scholars? Can any God-fearing Jew, who was sincerely trying to please God through his moral and ethical code, also be considered as one who is not under eschatological judgment?

In actuality, the only way that Cornelius can be used in support of inclusivism is if he did *not* come to faith in Jesus, yet was clearly shown in Scripture to be saved. However, this is simply not the case, any more than it was in the case of another God-fearing man whose

conversion is recorded in Acts, Saul of Tarsus. If ever there was a man who feared God and sincerely attempted to follow the Creator's will it was Saul of Tarsus. Yet by his own reckoning, the man who would become the Apostle Paul considered everything before his profession of faith in Christ to be "dung" (Phil. 3:8). Race's assessment of Paul's situation pre-conversion appears false: "If he had never been converted, his faith would surely have saved him" (*Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 148). This seems at odds with the Apostle's own admission.

What else does the story of Cornelius teach? It seems clear that Cornelius' status as a "God-fearer" was not good enough. A similar thing could be said about the Apostle Paul, or any of the disciples of Jesus for that matter. Simply having faith in God, in light of the first advent of the Christ, was not sufficient. The time of the Christ had now come. Faith in Jesus Christ was now necessary, otherwise Cornelius could have been left alone. As the Apostle Paul told the Athenians, the sovereign Lord, who "determined the times set for [men] and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26), had in the past "overlooked such ignorance, but now . . . commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31). From the whole scope of the Book of Acts, it is best to conclude that, had Cornelius not come to faith in Jesus Christ, he would not have been saved.

This is not just unsubstantiated conjecture either. As often happens with the biblical accounts, the answer to the question concerning Cornelius and his salvation prior to the arrival of Peter is found right in the account by Luke. In chapter 11, Peter is back in Jerusalem explaining to the "circumcised believers" why he had the audacity to go into a house of uncircumcised men and share a meal with them. As Peter explains his vision of the sheet with unclean food, he further recounts the messengers sent by Cornelius and the message they had for Peter. Specifically, the angel sent by God to Cornelius said this: "He [Peter] will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved" (11:14).

The chronology is crucial. Cornelius and his household *will be* saved through a message that Cornelius had yet to hear. His salvation did not come prior to Peter's arrival, but only after it. Cornelius' account should not be understood as bestowing upon him certain blessings through Christ on top of a salvation he already possessed, as the inclusivists errantly maintain (what Pinnock calls "full-strength salvation," *Wideness*, 105). Rather, had Cornelius not received the message of Peter concerning faith in Christ, he would not have received salvation.

It is crucial to understand what happened in the case of Cornelius. Here is a man who most likely was a “pagan” by all accounts, but who through his interaction with the Jews came to respect their traditions. He became intrigued with their teaching concerning the one, true God, and so he began to attend their services. He prayed to this God regularly and gave generously to the poor. For this, Luke refers to him as a “God-fearer.” Yet, up to this point Luke does not reckon him with the saved. This only happens after Cornelius heard Peter’s message and responded favourably to it.

In all of this there is not a hint that Cornelius’ pagan religion or beliefs had anything to do with garnering favour with God, or in bringing him to salvation. Cornelius serves as the quintessential example of the need for evangelism and taking the gospel to those who do not know it. Even a generous, prayerful, “God-fearing” man needed to hear the gospel and have faith in Christ before he could be saved.

3.2.5 Summary Concerning Pagan Saints

In summary, Cornelius does not serve as an example of a New Testament-era “pagan saint” as understood by inclusivists, but rather as more proof of the exclusivist’s position, namely, that a profession of faith in Jesus Christ is required for a person to be saved. “God-fearing” men such as Cornelius and Saul of Tarsus needed to move to faith in Jesus Christ if they were to escape eschatological judgment.

Pinnock concludes that a mistake is made when looking at these holy pagans as “rare exceptions rather than as a sign of hope” (*Wideness*, 99). But was Melchizedek truly a sign of hope, or was he rather a rare exception in Canaan? After all, what did God command Joshua to do to the people of Canaan? Would it not have made more sense to command Joshua to evangelise these holy pagans rather than to slaughter them completely? If God were truly “at work in the religious sphere of Canaanite culture,” it hardly makes good sense that God commanded the Israelites to kill all of them. In fact, is it not exactly because of Canaanite religion and culture that God wanted the Jews to wipe out the Canaanites, and that he was bitterly angry when the Israelites refused to do so? The opening chapters of the Book of Judges teach this lesson. Because the Israelites did not obey God and entirely wipe out the Canaanites, they fell into false worship of the very religions and gods of the Canaanite people. This is hardly support for the inclusivist’s claim about God and his supposed respect for Canaanite religion and culture.

Pinnock has made a *non sequitur* here. That God chose to save people other than Jews cannot be questioned, but this should not lead to the conclusion that the *religions* of the non-

Jews were the reason for their salvation. Similarly, it is one thing to say that God saves people who do not know Christ, but it is quite another to say that they never know about Christ and are still saved.

In some missiological instances, Muslims have claimed that God came in a dream and told them to speak to someone in their area who was a Christian.¹⁸² This is certainly an example of God's concern for people outside traditionally Christian nations, but it is not an example of how God used Islam to bring a person to redemption. The two are entirely different matters.

Both pluralists and to a lesser extent inclusivists use their experience of contact with moral or ethical people from other religious traditions as an argument to either base their pluralism or bolster their inclusivism.¹⁸³ However, do they truly know the heart of anybody, including themselves? It is one thing to recognise charitableness in a person; it is quite another matter to determine why that person is being charitable. Perhaps the person is looking to gain the favour of men, much like the hypocrites did during the time of Jesus. No doubt many people considered the Pharisees to be devout and righteous men. After all, they prayed several times a day, fasted several times a week, and gave to the poor. Would Hick or Pinnock have recognised their hypocrisy, or would they have been duped as seemingly the vast majority of Jews during that time were? In any event, arguing from the morality of people is not an adequate basis from which to conclude that God approves of non-Christian religions, or uses them to draw people to Christ.

"Holy pagans" such as Enoch, Abel, Rahab, Jethro, Job, Abimelech, Melchizedek, and others heard about the God of the Bible, and through this hearing about him put their faith in him. Pinnock is using poor examples to prove his inclusivist's point about the redemption of people in lands who have not heard about Jesus. Jethro knew about Yahweh because of his relationship with Moses (Ex. 18:1, 10-11). Rahab hid the spies because she had heard about the mighty deeds of the God of the Jews (Josh. 2:10). Job was a righteous man because he heard about God. Enoch is said to have "walked with God" (Gen. 5:24). For most of the examples usually used to support the pagan saints argument, these people knew Yahweh or had heard of his mighty deeds. Their faith was not mediated by their false religion. Their faith was a result of their knowledge of God. For some other examples, such as the case with Melchizedek, it is not entirely clear how they came to know about Jehovah, so to jump to false conclusions that it was because of their pagan religion would be a grave error to make.

¹⁸² Alister McGrath points this out in Okholm & Phillips, *Four Views*, 179.

¹⁸³ See Hick, *Four Views*, 39f, and Pinnock, *Four Views*, 102.

How do people come to faith in Jesus Christ? Paul writes, “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17).¹⁸⁴ The examples of holy pagans cannot be used to teach that God uses non-Christian religions to draw men to Christ. Quite the contrary. The examples of pagan saints confirm what is already known to be the case concerning the gospel. People who hear about Jesus can then confess him and declare their faith in him. Muslims through their honest and sincere devotion to Islam cannot come to saving faith in Jesus Christ without hearing the gospel, nor will they gain God’s approval apart from it. African Traditional Religions do not lead people to Christ, but rather foster fear of retribution from the ancestral spirits, and work to hold people captive to Satan. The polytheism of Hinduism and Buddhism only serves to drive people away from the one, true God, not draw them to him.

Job, Rahab, Abimelech, Cornelius, and others did not come to faith through their pagan religions, which only served to lead them away from God. They came to faith through contact with the one true God, via contact with Judaism (Naaman, Ruth, Queen of Sheba, Daniel, Cornelius), God’s people (Abimelech, Lot, Jethro, Rahab), or directly with God himself such as in the cases of Enoch and Noah. When coming to people like Melchizedek (or possibly Abel, although it is hardly a stretch to believe that Abel learned about God from his father Adam), when Scripture does not state how that person originally came to believe in the one, true God, false conclusions should not be made that it must have been via pagan religion or culture. The vast majority of pagan saints in the Bible came to faith in God because they had some contact with him or his people. With Melchizedek, it simply is not stated and it should be left at that. However, it would not be too much speculation to consider the possibility that he came to faith in God in a way similar to other pagan saints in the Old Testament, and there is not one example of a pagan saint in the category listed by Pinnock coming to faith in Jehovah via the worship of false gods, be they Baal, Molech, or the numerous gods of Egypt or Babylon or Canaan.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Interestingly, Paul then moves to an argument from what is normally considered general revelation, namely, the creation as witness to God, by quoting Psalm 19:4. He then moves to special revelation by quoting Moses and the prophet Isaiah, all to prove that Israel in fact did hear, and yet chose to rebel against God’s revelation. The rejection of both general and special revelation, then, are noted as bases for the condemnation of God.

¹⁸⁵ According to Genesis chapter 11, Abraham is the tenth generation from Noah. It is not hard to imagine people by that time who knew God and worshiped him. Melchizedek could very well have come to know God much like Rahab or Job knew him, by word of mouth. This is quite similar to a Christian missionary today taking the gospel to an unreached people.

3.2.6 “The Sword of the Spirit”

Pneumatology is concluded by returning to a bibliological matter. Pinnock makes this promising statement: “What the Spirit says and does cannot be opposed to revelation in Christ, because Spirit is bound to the Word of God” (*Flame*, 209). This is purely an evangelical statement that reflects the loyalty to God’s Word that Pinnock feels as an evangelical. But Pinnock and other inclusivists do not seem to be able to adequately balance their inclusivism with an evangelical view of Scripture.¹⁸⁶

Evangelical inclusivists have placed themselves in a bind. While attempting to maintain their orthodox view of Scripture in their Bibliology, they have unwittingly jeopardised it in their Pneumatology. To maintain the evangelical view of Scripture, they must agree with Paul who states, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Furthermore, Paul refers to the Word of God as “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph. 6:17) and from this can be seen the intimate relationship between Bibliology and Pneumatology.¹⁸⁷

It is precisely at this point that the inclusivist fails. An evangelical understanding of inspiration and illumination builds an intimate link between what is said about the Bible and what is said about the Holy Spirit. Note that the Word is the “sword of the Spirit.” The Word and the Spirit go hand in hand. One is not found without the other. The Holy Spirit is involved in complementing, not contradicting, what he has already inspired in his holy Word.

Hear the words of John Calvin on this matter: “The Spirit, promised to us, has not the task of inventing new and unheard-of revelations, or of forging a new kind of doctrine, to lead us away from the received doctrine of the gospel, but of sealing our minds with that very doctrine which is commended by the gospel” (*Institutes*, 1.9.1). The Holy Spirit is recognised in his agreement with God’s Word. The work of the Spirit and God’s Word are complementary, not contradictory. Where the Spirit is, so also is his sword. One senses that evangelical inclusivists would agree with such sentiments, but various statements they make call this into question. It is one thing to *say* that the Spirit must agree with the Word, as

¹⁸⁶ In his final chapter in *Flame*, Pinnock discusses bibliological views in greater detail and, while often sounding like an evangelical, most evangelicals will be disappointed to see him lean more heavily toward an Orthodox and Catholic understanding of the authority of tradition.

¹⁸⁷ Stanley Grenz, another contemporary evangelical who has pushed the boundaries of evangelicalism at times, agrees that there is a strong need for a Bibliology and Pneumatology that are intimately linked (*Revisioning Evangelical Theology*, 113-115, 125-128). He too questions the traditional evangelical view of biblical inerrancy and inspiration, and has tried to de-emphasise their importance, not dealing with Bibliology until nearly two-thirds of the way through his systematics, and then only under Pneumatology.

Pinnock does in his quotation above. It is quite another to maintain a theology which indeed supports it.

This is precisely where many theologians fail today. Again, this does not refer to liberals who have all but abandoned the orthodox view of Scripture. This refers to evangelicals of the inclusivist variety, those who proclaim their belief in the Bible as the Word of God and all that that entails. However, they also claim that the Holy Spirit today is working contrary to the very Word he inspired.

It is this sort of divergence that lies at the heart of many errors today. When the ministry of the Word is separated from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, two main faults can occur.

First, there are those who claim the Holy Spirit is working here or there, but what is seen is in direct conflict with God's Word. Where the Spirit is there also is his sword. God's Spirit will not be found working in a way that contradicts God's Word. Many Christians who are interested in a "spiritual experience" and seek some emotional verifications of their beliefs commonly fall into this error. It is the main error of some in the Pentecostal movement and those influenced by it. A certain anti-intellectualism pervades because, as is sometimes expressed, "I have the Holy Spirit living in me. Why do I need to study the Bible? The Spirit will guide me into all truth." What such people fail to grasp, though, is that the Holy Spirit is not given to make Bible study needless, but to make it effective.

Inclusivists are making the same mistake. They are attributing a contradictory work to the Holy Spirit, one which does not jibe with the holy Word. They are in essence telling people the Scripture is not necessary, because the Spirit is working, even in traditions and religions which are contrary to God's Word. They are ignoring the very words of Jesus, the one to whom the Spirit is meant to draw people. It is illogical to say the Spirit is drawing people to Christ, while at the same time implying that the words of Christ can be ignored.

The other error is the exact opposite, to have so much "head knowledge" of the Word that contact with God's Spirit is lost. The Word is viewed as a book filled with theological facts, and the lives of believers are devoid of any of the life and vibrancy of the Spirit. Their heads are in the right place, but their hearts are empty. Salvation is viewed solely as mental assent to propositional truths and not also as life given by the indwelling of God's Spirit. God's Spirit is limited to his activity in the "apostolic age" and believers live as if he has nothing to do in this day and age.

For this error Pinnock suggests powerful correctives (esp. in *Flame*), but in bemoaning an evangelicalism which leans toward the one error, Pinnock unwittingly proposes one which leans too much toward the other. Pinnock's Pneumatology suffers from his weak Bibliology.

Twentieth-century evangelical pastor and theologian A. W. Tozer emphasised a balance between the two when he said: "The great need of the hour among persons spiritually hungry is two fold: First, to know the Scriptures, apart from which no saving truth will be vouchsafed by our Lord; the second, to be enlightened by the Spirit, apart from whom the Scriptures will not be understood."¹⁸⁸ Where the Spirit is, so also is his sword.

Again, the words of Calvin are helpful. "For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit" (*Institutes*, 1.7.4). This is understandable because the Holy Spirit is the author of the revelation (2 Pet. 1:21-22; 2 Sam. 23:2; Ezk. 2:2; Mic. 3:8; Matt. 22:43; Acts 1:16; 4:25).

This topic is characteristically labelled illumination. It is the understanding that the Scriptures are not able to be entirely understood apart from the work of the Holy Spirit who enlightens or illumines the reader. Reformed author and professor at Trinity Divinity School, Wayne Grudem, has this to say on the matter: "Scripture is able to be understood by all unbelievers who will read it sincerely seeking salvation, and by all believers who will read it while seeking God's help in understanding it. This is because in both cases the Holy Spirit is at work overcoming the effects of sin, which otherwise will make the truth appear to be foolish (1 Cor. 2:14; 1:18-25; James 1:5-6, 22-25)" (1994:107-108).

In its first chapter, the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) covers the Scriptures and has this to say:

"We may be moved and induced by the testimony of the Church to a high and reverent esteem of the holy Scripture; and the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all glory to God), the full discovery it makes of the only way of man's salvation, the many other incomparable excellencies, and the entire perfection thereof, are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the Word of God; yet, notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts."

In short, a proper Bibliology cannot exist without a proper Pneumatology. Inclusivists believe that God's Spirit is, through non-Christian religions, wooing people to Christ. But

¹⁸⁸ *The Best of A. W. Tozer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 1991) 131.

could that argument have been used on Moses, say, during the golden calf incident? “But Moses, we are merely using an Egyptian-like idol to show our tribute to Jehovah.” God’s Spirit through the prophet Elijah condemned the prophets of Baal and Baal himself as a false god, but inclusivists believe that today, God’s Spirit is using similar false religions to draw people to Christ.¹⁸⁹

Evangelical theology has traditionally ascribed to what is called verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. This is in contradiction to other theories such as natural inspiration, partial inspiration, mystical inspiration, and the mechanical/dictation theory of inspiration. Verbal, plenary inspiration affirms that the very words (verbal) and all of them (plenary) were inspired by God. A good working definition of “inspiration” is: God’s superintending of human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error the revelation of God to humans in the words of the original autographs. “God completely adapted His inspiring activity to the cast of mind, outlook, temperament, interests, literary habits, and stylistic idiosyncrasies of each writer.”¹⁹⁰ This theory of inspiration affirms both the human and divine elements of the Bible.

The common objection that humans are flawed and everything they write will necessarily be flawed ignores the ministry of the Holy Spirit when it comes to the production of God’s Word.¹⁹¹ The doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration guards from the error that inevitably ensues in subscribing to other theories of inspiration. For instance, in any of the partial theories of inspiration, one is not sure which parts of the Bible are free from error and which are not.¹⁹² Trust in the Scriptures is minimised if not entirely destroyed. Who knows if this is really God speaking or just a fallible person? Verbal, plenary inspiration affirms that *all* of the words have come from God, while still maintaining the distinct personality of each author. “What is overcome or overridden by inspiration is not human personality, style or literary structure, but human tendencies to distortion, falsehood and error.”¹⁹³ It is the secular, humanist viewpoint that first denies the existence of God, or at minimum his involvement in

¹⁸⁹ Which falls in line with Pinnock’s positive statements about Canaanite culture and religion.

¹⁹⁰ J. I. Packer, as quoted in René Pache, *The Inspiration & Authority of Scripture* (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1980) 68.

¹⁹¹ As high of a regard as Pinnock has for the Holy Spirit, he falls short of granting the Spirit the ability to infallibly and inerrantly inspire authors in their composition of Scripture.

¹⁹² Normally, some external-to-the-Word authority is used, such as in neo-orthodox approaches, in order to determine which portions of Scripture are trustworthy and which are not. This understandably yields a variety of competing systems and authorities, and is wholly unsatisfactory to an evangelical position which views Scripture as the supreme authority.

¹⁹³ R. C. Sproul, *Explaining Inerrancy* (Oakland, CA: International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, 1980) 20.

his creation, ultimately concluding that an infallible, albeit human-produced, revelation from God in written form could not be produced.¹⁹⁴

Proof for such a view is found from Scripture itself.¹⁹⁵

- “The Bible constantly affirms that it is the very Word of the Lord” - see Ex. 17:14; Jer. 30:2; and “God said” passages such as Matt. 15:4 and Acts 28:25; 3808 times the Old Testament authors claim to be transmitting the very words of God.
- “Christ and the Apostles confirm the testimony of the Old Testament” - see Jesus’ use of the Scriptures, like Matt. 5:17-18 and John 10:35.
- “Even Christ’s preaching and that of the Apostles was called ‘the Word of God’” - parts of the New Testament assert that other parts of the New Testament are Scripture (1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Pet. 3:16).
- “In drawing up the New Testament, the Apostles were fully conscious that they were writing ‘the Word of God’” - see 1 Cor. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:11-12.

The doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration only echoes what Scripture itself says about God’s words: “Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him” (Prov. 30:5). The only reason God can be trusted is because his words are without error. In the long discourse by Jesus in John’s Gospel, chapters 14 to 17, no less than ten times Jesus mentions truth, in many instances referring to the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of truth” (14:17; 15:26; 16:13). Near the end of his prayer for the disciples, Jesus says that “your [God’s] word is truth” (John 17:17). It is no accident that Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit and God’s Word as truth.¹⁹⁶

Perhaps it seems strange to spend so much time on material that would seem better placed in the Bibliology section. However, inspiration and illumination are ministries of God’s Spirit and views concerning these doctrines will affect Bibliology, either positively or negatively. Negatively, a doctrine of inspiration that does not recognise the work of the Holy Spirit will

¹⁹⁴ As an aside, because humans are fallible it must not automatically be concluded that everything they do is fallible. Fallibility on the part of humans only ensures the *potential* for failure, not that humans are constantly failing. Put another way, it is not logical to conclude that the Bible *must* have errors because humans make errors. Humans can do things without errors and do so all the time. However, the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration is intended to guard against even the notion that the biblical authors made errors. Further, it would be a rather unsatisfactory theology which would conclude that God could not inspire men to record his revelation without errors.

¹⁹⁵ Taken from Pache *The Inspiration & Authority of Scripture* (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1980), the items in quotation marks are chapter headings. Much more could obviously be said about this matter.

¹⁹⁶ Jesus believed the Old Testament to be divinely inspired, the very words and will of God the Father. This should be the cause for some reflection on the part of those who find the Old Testament so distasteful, especially as it portrays God and his judgment.

demean the value of God's Word.¹⁹⁷ Constant references to the fallibility of men only works to undermine the authority of Scripture, as well as to secondarily call into question the ability of God to do such things as guard human authors from error. It is somewhat ironic that some scholars call people to trust God, but also do not believe God could even inspire fallible humans to infallibly record his will.¹⁹⁸

Which brings back the original point. Evangelical inclusivists like Clark Pinnock seem to unwittingly posit a faulty Pneumatology. What is the Holy Spirit doing in the world today? Well, from their point of view, it seems he is contradicting his own Word. In his Word he tells people to shun false religions, but in reality, he is using those false religions to draw people to God.

3.2.7 Conclusion to Pneumatological Evaluation

Is God using non-Christian religions as vehicles of salvation (Catholic inclusivists) or as means of grace through which he draws people to himself (evangelical inclusivists)? Is the Holy Spirit truly working through these areas of human culture, making the offer of salvation via prevenient grace truly a universal offer?

Inclusivism's positive portrayal of non-Christian religions and God's utilisation of them to draw people to himself appears to lack support either in the biblical data or by the theological arguments mainly used by inclusivists, as seen above. The overwhelming witness of Scripture is that God is not pleased with non-Judeo-Christian religions, let alone viewing them as vehicles of salvation or means by which he draws individuals to himself. Much of inclusivism's positive portrayal of these faiths is based on a faulty reading of Scripture, coupled with a misunderstanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This has resulted because of inclusivism's radical bifurcation between God's Word and God's Spirit.

¹⁹⁷ "Inspiration is the determining influence exercised by the Holy Spirit on the writers of the Old and New Testaments in order that they might proclaim and set down in an exact and authentic way the message as received from God" (Pache, 45).

¹⁹⁸ In Paul's comments in First Corinthians about the Gospel as "foolishness" to those who desire miracles (Jews) or wisdom (Greeks), his solution to this apparent dilemma is not to change the gospel to make it more palatable, as if more signs could be produced, or to hammer out a more rationally-acceptable message. Paul's solution lies in Pneumatology and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. His discussion for the rest of chapter 1 and through much of the next chapter concerns the ministry of God's Spirit, culminating in 2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." Paul's solution to the gospel as unacceptable, offensive, or unreasonable is not to be found in the Church's improved marketing or packaging of the message. Paul lays the entire responsibility for solving this dilemma at the feet of the Holy Spirit.

3.3 What Is the Character of the Father, According to Jesus?

A Christological Reflection on Judgment

Jesus Christ stands at the centre of *Christianity*, and rightly so. The entire Old Testament looked forward to his first advent, and in the “last days” we have looked back to it. The incarnation of the God-man is the pivotal point of history, not just of salvation history, but of human history.

Pluralist John Hick has famously proposed a Copernican Revolution whereby Christ is removed from the centre of Christian theology and God placed there instead. This is his attempt to make Christianity more in line with other world religions, by removing the offence of Christ’s particularity. Inclusivist Clark Pinnock has produced a similar suggestion in his *Spirit Christology*, as already noted. While retaining the cardinal doctrines of Trinity and incarnation, Pinnock has nonetheless removed Christ as the focal point of Christian Soteriology.

In this section, a hermeneutic of judgment will be used in order to test the propositions of inclusivism, specifically as they relate to the person and teaching of Jesus.

3.3.1 Trinitarian Considerations

Who is Jesus? That question occupied the early Church for centuries and resulted in various conclusions, chief among them the decisions of the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon. And although the question of who Jesus is is never ultimately or experientially exhausted, it seemed that the conclusions of the early councils had closed the case on the matter.¹⁹⁹

Inclusivists make it a point to refer to the “God of Jesus,” but the “God of Jesus” is none other than the God revealed in the Old Testament. In other words, evangelicals who want these two things - to move away from the “vindictive” God of the Old Testament, and to concentrate on the “God of Jesus” - have a serious problem to deal with, because the “God of Jesus” is that very same vindictive, wrathful God they so much disdain from the Old Testament. There is no difference in his character and nature. The Old Testament God and the God revealed by Jesus Christ are one and the same Being.

In fact, a Trinitarian dogma determines a more intimate conclusion than even this. Not only is the God revealed by Jesus Christ and the God revealed in the Old Testament the same Being, but Trinitarianism also insists that the character of God’s Son, who is *homoousios* with

¹⁹⁹ This is not meant to grossly simplify what was and still is a difficult issue, and certainly after Chalcedon, debates still existed as to the interaction of the natures and wills of Jesus and whether he truly was one person. Still, major conclusions as to his deity and the incarnation were open and shut cases for the orthodox church. That occasional people and movements questioned these conclusions is an obvious fact of history.

the Father, is the very same character of the Father who sent him, the God of the Old Testament. There can be no iota of a difference between the character and nature of God's Son and that of the Old Testament God who, for example, spoke to Moses, dealt with King David and King Saul, or who played a "cosmic bet" with Satan over the loyalty of Job. The "meek and mild" Saviour has the exact same character and nature as the God who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah; the angry man who cleared the temple of the traders and hawkers has the exact same character and nature as the "slow to anger, abounding in love" Yahweh of the Old Testament. To say anything different is to deny the foundation of the Trinitarian dogma, a bedrock of Christian theological understanding for centuries.

The God that Jesus Christ prayed to in the Garden of Gethsemane is the same God who banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. The God who providentially protected Moses during the slaughter of the Israelite baby boys in Egypt is the same God who providentially protected the boy Jesus when Herod commanded the baby boys of Israel to be murdered. A false dichotomy between the God of wrath in the Old Testament and the God of love in the New cannot be maintained.²⁰⁰ Such latent Gnosticism must be discarded.

Even further, the God who parted the Red Sea for Moses and the fleeing Israelites has the same character as the Son of Man who calmed the stormy sea for the fearful disciples. The character of the one who was transfigured on Mount Hermon is the same in character to the one who was revealed on Mount Sinai. Jesus is understood to fully reveal the character and nature of the Father because his character and nature are the same as the Father's.

Returning to the original objective, an evaluation of the typical inclusivist approach to the teaching of Jesus is needed. Is the traditional evangelical view of God's judgment really out of line with the portrayal of the Father by the Son?

3.3.2 The Judgment of God in the Teaching of Jesus

In the following sections, the teaching of Jesus as found in the four Gospels will be investigated specifically as it relates to the wrath and judgment of God, which has particular significance for the topic of this dissertation. Areas such as the parables, Jesus' dealings with the scribes and Pharisees, and so on, will be discussed.

²⁰⁰ As noted previously, Pinnock unfortunately does precisely this.

3.3.2.1 Jesus and the Pharisees²⁰¹

Pinnock compares exclusivists to the Pharisees (*Flame*, 212-213), who begrudged God's grace shown to others outside their little community, but is this a fair accusation to make? If true, then exclusivists should have major cause for alarm, because Jesus consistently condemned the Pharisees. The study begins here, then, because what is said by Jesus about the Pharisees can potentially yield great fruit in the debate between exclusivism and inclusivism, especially as it relates to God's judgment.

The Pharisees were a common whipping boy of the Son of Man, so why spend time on them? Virtually all will agree that in this case, Jesus did indeed have strong words of judgment against them, and rightly so. For the Pharisees were the quintessential hypocrites, saying one thing but doing another.

However, this is not the only reason why Jesus chastised the Pharisees. The situation is much more nuanced than the simplistic understanding that the criticism Jesus levelled at the Pharisees was only because they were hypocritical religious leaders. Certainly, he criticised their hypocrisy particularly as it related to their public displays of worship, but Jesus also attacked the Pharisees because they believed themselves to be approved by God, and this mainly by their religious practises and human-made traditions. It would help to dwell on this matter because in today's pluralistic age, many people are doing the very same things the Pharisees were doing – worshiping God via their self-made traditions. Such notions of justification before God via one's own works of righteousness were reprehensible to Jesus.

The temptation, then, to limit the judgment statements by Jesus concerning the Pharisees to just religious leaders, thus skirting any weight those words might have when directed toward someone not in a position of religious leadership, fails to recognise the impact the words of Jesus have on all people. The criticism Jesus had for the Pharisees is more far-reaching than most people recognise and goes beyond simply those who are hypocritical in their religious leadership. In fact, there were three main reasons why Jesus opposed the Pharisees and their practises.²⁰²

²⁰¹ It should be noted that "the Pharisees" is used here as a catch-all phrase for those religious leaders who were condemned by Jesus, such as the scribes, teachers of the law, and so on. Because what is said in this section is applied in a more general way, it matters little if in one instance Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, and in another more specifically to the teachers of the law, who may or may not have been Pharisees.

²⁰² It should be noted that the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees did not only comprise opposition. In fact, in some instances Pharisees 1) warning Jesus about a plot against his life (Luke 13:31), 2) inviting Jesus for meals (Luke 7:36-50; 14:1), and 3) who were, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, secretly disciples of him (John 3:1f; 19:38). "However, Pharisaic opposition to Jesus is a persistent theme in all four Gospels" (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 914). Whether this opposition was for political or religious reasons, or a combination of the two, is also up for debate.

The first concerned their public acts of righteousness, and the remarks of Jesus directed at the Pharisees in the Sermon on the Mount are telling. Today, it is not uncommon for a public figure or person with a high level of notoriety or fame to call a press conference to declare his or her generosity in giving an amount of money to some charitable organisation. The Pharisees were the same, making public pronouncements concerning their vigilance in various acts of righteousness. They performed these acts before others, to be seen by them and hence to receive their praise. In the well-known passage in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus deals with such hypocrites and three particular acts of righteousness: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

The acts of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting are just a microcosm of a whole horde of righteous activities often performed to garner the praise of men. In short, there are dozens of good things that can be done, at least in part, to bolster our own egos and profiles in the eyes of others. When positively speaking about the morality of peoples of other faiths, a little more caution in praising them may be needed than inclusivists exercise.

Another reason why Jesus publicly condemned the Pharisees was because they served as improper religious leaders for the people, what Jesus called “blind guides” (Matt. 15:14; 23:16,24). They were misleading the people through their false teaching. The whole while considering themselves to be experts in the law, they strained out gnats but swallowed camels (Matt. 23:24).²⁰³ Appearing in all three Synoptic Gospels, the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt. 21:33-46, Mark 12:1-12, Luke 20:9-19) speaks directly to this improper leadership. The clear allusion for the wicked tenants of the parable is the Pharisees and religious leaders of the day. In fact, once they heard this teaching by Jesus, the Gospels say that they looked for a way to have him arrested.

The chastisement Jesus reserved for the Jewish religious leaders took various forms. One way was to question their knowledge of the Scriptures. By using phrases such as, “Haven’t you read?” (Matt. 12:5; 19:4) or, “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures” (Matt. 22:29), Jesus meant to expose the ignorance of the teachers and experts in the law. It was from this basic ignorance of God’s Word that all their other problems flowed.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ In a desire to follow the law perfectly, but ultimately legalistically, the Pharisees would strain their drinking water through a cloth to be sure not to swallow a gnat, the smallest of unclean animals. But, figuratively, Jesus is saying that they are swallowing something much larger that was also considered unclean.

²⁰⁴ In a related sense, the confrontations Jesus had with the Pharisees concerning Sabbath observance also questioned the authority of the religious leaders and exposed their misunderstanding of the Scriptures (for example, Matt. 12:1f [parallel Mark 2:23f; Luke 6:1f]; Mark 1:21f [parallel Luke 4:31f]; 3:1f; Luke 13:10f; 14:1f; John 5:1f; 7:21f; 9:13f).

Similarly, Jesus warned people about the yeast of the Pharisees. Used positively, the imagery of yeast was used by Jesus to signify the growth of the kingdom of God, but used negatively, it was meant to show how dangerous the teaching of the Pharisees could be. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt. 16:6, 11-12; also Luke 12:1). Like yeast, their teaching could quickly spread and infect the thinking of others around them.²⁰⁵

Along related lines, Jesus says that the Pharisees “do not practise what they preach” (Matt. 23:3). This is perhaps the most recognisable form of hypocrisy. In the case of the Pharisees, Jesus states, “They tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them” (vs. 4).

Which leads to another way in which Jesus attempted to expose the inadequacy of the religious leaders of his day. Not only did they act improperly, but they also taught what should not have been taught. Instead of teaching the Word of God, these experts in the law foisted their own, human-made laws upon the people. In Matthew 15 and the parallel passage in Mark 7, Jesus is questioned by some Pharisees and teachers of the law as to why his disciples break the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before eating (Matt. 15:3f, Mark 7:3f).²⁰⁶ Jesus took this opportunity to expose yet another failing in the leadership of the Pharisees. “You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men” (Mark 7:8). In so doing, they are said to “nullify the word of God” (Matt. 7:6) and are “setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions” (Mark 7:9). In both accounts Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13 which ends with this condemnation: “Their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

It would help to pause here and reflect on this message from the mouth of the Saviour. What is done in churches that are simply human-made traditions and not commands from God and Scripture, yet are demanded that members obey these rules and regulations? How much of theology and dogma today would be condemned by Jesus himself as the “traditions of men,” ultimately nullifying the words and commands of God?

All three types of criticism of these “blind guides” are tied together. The Pharisees did not know the Scriptures, they demanded that others live holy lives while they lived hypocritical ones, and they replaced the commands of God with their own human-made

²⁰⁵ “In the Bible yeast often represents evil (e.g., Ex. 12:15; Lev. 2:11; 6:17; 10:12; Matt. 16:6, 11-12; Mark 8:15; Luke 12:1; 1 Cor. 5:7-8; Gal. 5:8-9)” (Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, [Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983] 195).

²⁰⁶ In Mark’s account further states that “they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles” (Mark 7:4).

traditions. From an ignorance of Scripture comes all sorts of distortions. As Jesus said, “If a blind man leads a blind man both will fall into a pit” (Matt. 15:14b).

Jesus compared these religious leaders to thieves and wolves (John 10:7-13), he called them snakes and a brood of vipers (Matt. 23:33, see similarly John the Baptist, Matt. 3:7), and he warned the people to beware of these teachers who would be punished most severely (Luke 20:46; Mark 12:40). In the well-known confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus over paying taxes to Caesar, Jesus once again called them hypocrites (Matt. 22:18). It is passages such as these that are most recalled when thinking of the condemnation Jesus had for the Pharisees, normally making them the whole story. In other words, the other reasons why Jesus condemned these hypocritical religious leaders are ignored.

Many act as if the criticism Jesus reserved for the Pharisees had *only* to do with religious leaders, and as the majority of believers are not religious leaders, his judgment words to them have little bearing on their lives. But as has been noted earlier, many religious people (and non-religious for that matter) are guilty of doing righteous deeds to gain the accolades of men, or creating human-made traditions and pretending they have come from God. As seen with the next point, other habits frequently performed by the Pharisees can also be seen today.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over the land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are” (Matt. 23:15). This horribly damning statement strikes at the heart of what the Pharisees were and believed. They believed themselves to be righteous before God because they performed righteous acts. Their zealotry for ritual purification fostered pride and false security in their own righteousness, and they made their converts equally arrogant and insecure. One need only review the autobiography of the Apostle Paul, a Pharisee of Pharisees, to recognise how before his conversion he mistook his own zealotry for personal salvation and holiness (Phil. 3:4b-6).

Jesus claims that the Pharisees “justify [themselves] in the eyes of men” (Lk.16:15). He then notes, “What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight.” Jesus loathed this type of self-justification and self-righteousness.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like white washed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men’s bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness” (Matt. 23:27-28).

What of the world's great religions? So many human-made traditions and practises, all supposedly bringing people closer to God. Did the Pharisees not also have the same fanciful systems, and what was Jesus' response to them? Jesus chastised the Pharisees for nullifying the Word of God for the sake of their traditions. He then called them hypocrites.

The difficulty for inclusivists who make positive statements about the morality of the adherents of non-Christian religions is that they simply cannot know if such adherents are secretly acting like Pharisees. By either ignoring the condemnatory words of Jesus directed at the Pharisees, or by limiting their application only to religious leaders, the mistake of missing their wider application occurs. Can there seriously be an expectation that the message of Jesus is one of salvation for each and every individual, even those individuals whom Jesus himself condemned? How logical is it to say people are following Jesus, or supporting his teaching, when they flatly ignore what he said?

3.3.2.2 Jesus and the Parables

Many of the parables are among the favourite and most cherished words from the mouth of Jesus.²⁰⁷ The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37) and the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15:11-32) probably top the list as most read, most frequently preached parables from the teachings of Jesus.²⁰⁸ In this section some key parables used by inclusivists in support of their soteriological conclusions will be evaluated, but also with an eye to those which they tend to ignore.

At times the inclusivist usage of the parables can appear arbitrary. Pinnock, for example, uses the Prodigal Son (eg., *Wideness*, 103) as the quintessential parable of God's love, to the exclusion of any notion of God's wrath or judgment, but is this a fair reckoning? Two issues immediately present themselves in this regard: Are those parables typically used by inclusivists solely devoted to God's loving-kindness, or do they not also have elements of judgment, and can the parables of grace be used to somehow offset the other parables with far more elements of doom and judgment?

²⁰⁷ They are also noted to be the favourite form of teaching by Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels. "Parables make up about sixteen per cent of Mark, about twenty-nine per cent of Q, about forty-three per cent of M and about fifty-two per cent of L" (Joel Green and Scot McKnight, (eds.), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992] 594). Note Mark 4: 33-34: "With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable." See also Matt. 13:34.

²⁰⁸ "Some scholars count a total of sixty parables and parabolic sayings in the Synoptic Gospels" (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 824). "An exact number of the parables cannot be given since there is no agreement among scholars as to which forms should be classified as a parable" (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 595-596). The latter source notes that some take the counting as high as sixty-five parables.

As inclusivism's coverage of parables is investigated, the teaching of Jesus concerning judgment and the wrath of God, a hermeneutic of judgment, will particularly be sought. This means elements of judgment will be sought, not necessarily parables that speak *only* about judgment or wrath.

For example, in Capon's series on parables his second volume deals with the parables of grace, as he defines them, but many of these parables have elements of judgment as well. Note for example that Capon covers in his parables of grace: the Unforgiving (Unmerciful) Servant, the Rich Fool, the Watchful Servants, the Barren Fig Tree, the Great Banquet, the Rich Man and Lazarus, and the Narrow Door. All of these parables have strong elements of judgment. Capon even notes that the parable of the Good Samaritan is "apparently judgmental" (*Grace*, 108). This study will be concerned more with the *elements of judgment* found therein, not whether one parable or another can be entirely considered a parable of grace or judgment.

The parables that seem most memorable are the parables of grace, the sentimental parables that speak of God's undying love for the lost.²⁰⁹ Human beings have a tendency to remember the parables that produce good feelings, while forgetting or outright ignoring the ones that have a harsher tone. But many of the parables have strong elements of judgment and convey the wrath of both the Father and the Son. Examples include The Wheat and Tares, Wedding Banquet, Sheep and Goats, Barren Fig Tree, Wicked Tenants, and Narrow Door.

Before looking at specific passages, a general observation can first be made. The vast majority of the parables of Jesus have something to say about judgment. The notion that Jesus was "love, love, love" and nothing more is a falsehood. This will be important to remember because inclusivists seem to concentrate only on the positive elements of the parables, while ignoring the negative ones.

3.3.2.2.1 Judgment as Separation

One of the stronger, more prominent teachings of Jesus concerned the separation of peoples. There are only two types of people in the reckoning of Jesus. Some are like bad fish, weeds, goats, and ungrateful guests, while others are like good fish, wheat, sheep, and grateful guests. There seems to be no "fence sitters," no people who do not properly fall into either of these

²⁰⁹ Jeremias referred to the Prodigal Son as the "Parable of the Father's Love" (*The Parables of Jesus* [New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963] 128). This is an example perhaps of poisoning the well, so to speak, because the entire purpose of the parable is now assumed in its title. Consequently, any elements of judgment may potentially be ignored or missed.

two categories. This is made all the more stark with the Parable of the Narrow Door, which speaks of only two doors and two roads. One road leads to life, the other to destruction. Again, there is no third category, the “undecideds,” but rather, only two roads and two types of people characterised by the road they choose to tread. All people have their feet firmly planted on one of these two paths.²¹⁰

Many Christian scholars today deny such a teaching. For the universalist, no such system of paths can exist. There is only one road and it leads to eternal life.²¹¹ For the pluralist, one is hard pressed to find any appeal to the “road that leads to destruction” in their writings. On the contrary, everything spoken by them about the world’s great religions is only positive. Inclusivism appears in many respects similar to pluralism on this matter. However, according to Jesus, a time is coming when all people will be separated. Those who are “bad fish” will be “thrown into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 13:50). Similarly, weeds will be uprooted and burned. The Parable of the Weeds is one of the few parables where Jesus gives a detailed explanation of its meaning. The weeds, he says, are the sons of the evil one (Matt. 13:38) and they are later described as those who cause sin and do evil (vs. 41).

Both parables of the Net and Weeds speak of a time to come, the Second Coming of the Son of Man, when these events will take place. It should be briefly noted that the title, Son of Man, is the most frequently used title in the Gospels by Jesus in referring to himself (used 82 times throughout the four Gospels). The term itself is laden with eschatological weight and should not be ignored when investigating Jesus’ teaching on the judgment of God. Jesus is unique in his usage of this image from Daniel, and many of the parables involving separation at the Last Day have the figure of the Son of Man as the primary Separator (see *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 1127-1129).²¹²

How frequently do Pinnock and Sanders speak about this aspect of the teaching of Jesus? To ignore these teachings of Jesus is not to ignore a small, insignificant fraction of his words. It is to ignore a large, central portion of his teachings. Christian theologians, pastors, church leaders, and scholars who choose to not share this with the Christian public are acting like modern-day Pharisees, nullifying the word of God and replacing it with their own human-made traditions and teachings. If a person is standing on the railroad tracks and a train is fast

²¹⁰ This is reminiscent of the teaching of the Didache, the “Two Ways,” one of life and the other death.

²¹¹ “In a universe of love there can be no Heaven which tolerates a chamber of horrors” (J.A.T. Robinson, cited in Sanders, *No Other Name*, 106).

²¹² “The Second Coming of Christ is one of the most pervasive doctrines on the pages of the New Testament. It is mentioned over three hundred times, an average of once for every thirteen verses from Matthew to Revelation” (Blanchard, *Hell*, 91).

approaching, how loving is it to ignore the train and not warn the person of his or her impending doom? Jesus frequently warned his listeners of the judgment to come; evangelicals today should do likewise. It is, in fact, the loving thing to do.

The Net and the Weeds parables both end with harsh words from Jesus. The bad fish and the worthless weeds will be destroyed and it is here that the first sight of Jesus' characterisation of this judgment as a "fiery furnace" is seen, where there will be "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42, 50). Jesus does not mince words when speaking of this impending judgment. In both instances, Jesus speaks of the "end of the age" and that is a clue in determining what type of judgment Jesus is referring to here, clearly an eschatological one.

3.3.2.2.2 The Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Its Context

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats is another eschatological parable concerning the end times and is more expanded than either the Net or the Weeds. This parable stands at the end of Matthew's Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24-25) and as such takes a special place in this eschatological message of Jesus. In fact, it is the last of four parables in this section. On the surface this parable appears to be strongly in favour of the inclusivist position, and therefore considerable time will be spent on it.

In this parable, Jesus develops the explanation of why some people are considered goats and others sheep, and it impinges directly on what they did. The Shepherd gathers the nations before him and separates them into two types of people, sheep and goats. It seems that the righteous people, the sheep, do not even know they are sheep. Perhaps they are "anonymous Christians" to use a phrase by a famous inclusivist. They have simply done that which is good in the eyes of the Great Separator and so are rewarded with eternal life for what they have done.

This is a tempting interpretation, but it ignores something of paramount importance in the passage. These acts of kindness – the giving of food to the hungry and water to the thirsty, clothing the naked, helping the strangers and the sick, and visiting the incarcerated – are all acts of kindness done to the "brothers" of Jesus (Matt. 25:40). These are not just random acts of kindness; they are acts of mercy to the children of God, those who stand in this privileged position by their faith in God's Son (John 1:12).²¹³

²¹³ Note the similar teaching in Mark 9:41: "I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward." The act of kindness is done in the name of the Lord and is not simply a random act of kindness.

Pinnock actually recognises the possibility of this interpretation, noting that he used to hold to it himself (*Wideness*, 203, n. 33; also 164). This interpretation takes into account the wider context of Matthew, especially as it relates to the emissaries of Christ. “He who receives you receives me” (10:40). This reasonable understanding of the parable, then, appears to be rejected by Pinnock not for exegetical reasons but for theological ones. Is this justified?

Recognising the context of this parable is a key to understanding its meaning. After general statements made to the crowds (Matt. 23:1), Jesus turns his attention to private comments for his disciples. “The disciples came to him privately” (Matt. 24:3) begins a different discussion by Jesus, one which continues through chapter 24 and 25. At the beginning of chapter 26, Jesus makes his concluding comments to his disciples before Matthew shifts to a different scene, that of the chief priests and elders conspiring to arrest and kill Jesus.

Recognition of this immediate context – private comments to the disciples – is paramount if an understanding is expected not only of what Jesus is saying in this discourse, but also why he is saying it. This is not a general teaching to all people, supporting the notion that people will be rewarded by their random acts of kindness as if they are some sort of “anonymous” Christians. In fact, all four of the concluding parables in the Olivet Discourse presuppose an audience of disciples or followers of Jesus [parables of the Wise Servant (24:45-51), Ten Virgins (25:1-13), Talents (25:14-30), and Sheep and Goats (25:31-46)].

In the wider context of Matthew’s Gospel, these end-times statements of Jesus should be understood in light of the warnings at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the teaching of Jesus concerning the relationship of God’s kingdom to the person of the Christ, and the cost of discipleship (eg., let the dead bury their dead, hand to the plough, and carry your cross statements). A hermeneutic of judgment makes this context more understandable. It is a sifting message, a message of judgment. If people think they are safe, if they believe themselves to be true followers of Jesus Christ, then think again.

When attempting to understand the Sheep and Goats in this wider context, there are two choices. Either Jesus is saying that all that is required for membership into the kingdom of God is random acts of kindness; or the parable is teaching one aspect or characteristic of the members of the kingdom. In the immediate context of the Olivet Discourse and the four parables found therein, it is seen that members of the kingdom of heaven are faithful (The Wise Servant), watchful (The Ten Virgins), good stewards (The Talents), and benevolent (The Sheep and Goats). If the Sheep and Goats is understood the way that inclusivists use it,

it must be presupposed that all people are “brothers” of Jesus, but this can hardly be supported from the rest of Scripture, let alone from the words of Jesus (see esp. Lk. 8:21).

The four parables in the Olivet Discourse must be understood in the context of relationship. Simply obeying the propositional truths found in the teaching of Jesus is not the point. One must be found in *relationship* with Jesus. Empty words will not suffice when the final sifting is performed. “Lord, Lord” will sound a hollow echo when it has not been accompanied with fruit signifying genuine faith. Jesus is not stating how a person will enter the kingdom of heaven, but rather what the characteristics of its members are.

In the Parable of the Talents, the third servant does not really know the master. The first two faithful servants are told to “enter into the joy of *your* master” (Mt. 25:21, 23), signifying a relationship. But the third servant is shown to not know the master, as he mischaracterises his nature (25:24, 26 – see the ESV, where vs. 26 is posed in the form of a question and does not imply that the master actually agrees with the assessment of his character by the servant). In the Parable of the Ten Virgins, there is a similar context. The bridegroom’s final response to the five unprepared virgins is, “Truly, I say to you, *I do not know you*” (Mt. 25:12b). Clearly the issue in all four parables is relationship, not simply raw deeds divorced from any knowledge of the Master.

Further, this one parable should not be taken and played against all the other teaching of Jesus (e.g., teaching which emphasises belief in him) or the teaching found in the rest of Scripture. Certainly, good works are important, but if the Parable of the Sheep and Goats is read and it is concluded that people will be justified by their good works, the parable has been misread. What underlies these acts of kindness is that these people showed them to the family of God, the brothers of Jesus, the faithful. In other words, they cared about God’s children and his kingdom.

R. T. France brings this point home in his commentary on Matthew, and it is worth quoting his comments in full:

“Until fairly recently it was generally assumed that this passage grounded eternal salvation on works of kindness to all in need, and that therefore its message was a sort of humanitarian ethic, with no specifically Christian content. As such, it was an embarrassment to those who based their understanding of the gospel on Paul’s teaching that one is justified by faith in Christ and not by ‘good works’. Was Matthew (or Jesus?) then against Paul?

More recent interpreters have insisted, however, that such an interpretation does not do justice to the description of those in need as Jesus’ *brothers* . . . It is

therefore increasingly accepted that the criterion of judgment is not kindness to the needy in general, but the response of the nations to *disciples* in need. . . . the criterion of judgment becomes not mere philanthropy, but men's response to the kingdom of Heaven as it is presented to them in the person of Jesus' 'brothers'.²¹⁴

In short, it would be difficult to appeal to this passage in order to support a pluralist or inclusivist position that equates doing random acts of kindness as "knowing Jesus" and hence warranting salvation.

Having said that, evangelicals should not turn around and ignore the significance acts of kindness play in the population of the kingdom of God. People who do not do them for the brothers of Jesus are "goats." Far too many evangelical Christians, in rightly emphasising that justification is by faith and not by works, then go right ahead and ignore works, as if they are of no importance. Such a Soteriology, one which is only "other worldly" and not "this worldly" plays faith against good works. As John Calvin said, believers are justified by faith and not by works, but not by a faith without works. Or as James states, "faith without works is dead" (Jms. 2:26).

The last point to make concerning the Parable of the Sheep and Goats is that Jesus ends it with a comment about eternal punishment (vs. 46). This picture of the last judgment is an ominous one. The goats will go to the "eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (vs. 41). The sheep are placed on the right-hand side of the Shepherd, the place of honour and privilege, while the goats are placed on the left-hand side, the place of shame and dishonour (vs. 33). Again, it must be noted that there are only two classes of people. This is true separation.

As concerns the Parable of the Wise Servant, the final judgment is forceful to say the least: "[He] will be cut to pieces and put...with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (24:51) Three elements of this statement carry the force of weighty judgment, i.e., being cut to pieces, being reckoned with the hypocrites, and a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth.

With the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the phraseology is not nearly so forceful yet readers must not be deceived into thinking it is somehow less condemning or damning. The five unprepared virgins find themselves shut out of the marriage feast, and from the imagery of a

²¹⁴ R.T. France, *Matthew: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Leister: InterVarsity Press, Leicester, 1985) 355. Note also Herbert Lockyer's commentary, *All the Parables of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), on this specific issue: "This is to be the question for the nations. 'What are they doing with Jesus? What are they doing with His message? What are they doing with His messengers? What are they doing with all the spiritual forces and moral powers that he has set at liberty, and which are to work through His people in the age? Upon the basis of that, His judgment will be found for, or against them'" (250).


marriage feast used elsewhere by Jesus, it is hard to understand this as anything other than being shut out of eternal salvation. With the Parable of the Talents, the terminology is similar to that used with the faithful servant, including being cast in the outer darkness, being reckoned as a worthless servant, and again a place of weeping and gnashing of teeth. The Sheep and Goats concludes this section with a reference to “eternal punishment” and “eternal life.”²¹⁵

3.3.2.2.3 Jesus Knows His Sheep

Rather than this parable being an account of how Jesus will judge every individual based on his good works, it is instead an account of how Jesus identifies with his people. At the heart of the disagreement between differing interpretations of this passage rests an understanding of who represents the “children of God.” Generally speaking, pluralists and to a lesser extent inclusivists see all people as having the right to claim this title, “children of God,” by reason of the fact that all people are descendants of Adam, who was created by God. Those who support this position would see the reference to “the least of these brothers of mine” as referring to anybody, regardless of their faith or religion or creed, an argument which makes no basic distinction between the brotherhood of mankind in general versus the brotherhood of followers of Jesus.

On the other hand, as already noted, “brother” can have a more specific meaning referring not generally to any one individual, but more precisely to those who follow Jesus and his teaching. In fact, this is exactly how Jesus uses the term in Mark 3:35 where he says, “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” There is a special relationship here, one that evidently supersedes one based on paternal descent or physical reproduction.

In fact, it is precisely of this type of relationship of which John speaks when he states: “Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12-13). This special relationship is not simply the product of a physical descent which runs all the way from Adam to all of humanity. Rather, it is a relationship which has as its basis faith in the Second Adam, the Logos incarnate, Jesus Christ. From John’s Gospel it is clear that physical birth and membership into humanity do

²¹⁵ The Greek word  (*kolasis*) is also translated “punishment,” but as *Vine’s* notes this word “as being disciplinary . . . cannot be maintained in the *Koinē* Greek of N.T. times” (231). It is used in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, where it is translated as “eternal punishment” (Mt. 25:46). As the verse juxtaposes “eternal punishment” with “eternal life,” this term should be understood as eschatological judgment.

not produce the “right” that is necessary to be called children of God. As Jesus tells Nicodemus, rebirth is necessary in order to become a member of the kingdom of God (John 3:3f), and without this rebirth, the wrath of God remains upon those who do not believe in the Son (John 3:18, 36). Individuals are not naturally or physically born into the family of God, they are supernaturally and spiritually reborn into it.

Given this understanding it is wrongheaded to attempt to make the meaning of the Sheep and Goats as a general teaching on good works and an individual’s entrance in the kingdom based solely on this criterion. Such an understanding does injustice to the special use of “brother” by Jesus, as well as the entire context of the teaching of Jesus, both as it refers to the use of this term, and in a broader sense as it refers to the requirements for entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

What is seen in this teaching is Jesus identifying with his disciples, those who have chosen to follow him. As seen in the Good Shepherd passage of John 10, the true sheep of Jesus know his voice, and he gladly lays down his life for them. “I know my sheep and my sheep know me” (vs. 14b) signifies a special relationship between the sheep and the shepherd, a relationship that echoes the relationship between the Son and the Father (“just as the Father knows me and I know the Father,” vs. 15).

Similarly, this identification between Jesus and his followers is found in Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” This appears to be a redundant statement by Jesus, given the biblical understanding of his deity, because he would certainly be there among them given the fact that he is omnipresent. However, no redundancy is meant here, but rather a signification of intimacy and identity is intended. In other words, Jesus is telling his followers that when they come together – “in my name,” which is the key to understanding this passage – he will be with them in a special presence.

A powerful indication of this special relationship and identity of Christ with his people – the sheep who know his voice – is found in the Pharisee Saul turned Apostle Paul’s Damascus Road encounter. Acts 9 is the first recounting of this experience as Saul was on his way to persecute the believers in Damascus. Luke says that Saul intended to take any believers found in Damascus and transport them to prison in Jerusalem (9:2). On his way, Paul is confronted by Christ himself, who asks this question: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (vs. 4). When the soon-to-be-renamed Saul asks who it is speaking to him, the reply is telling: “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (vs. 5).

Note that Jesus does not say that Saul is persecuting the church, or believers, which would certainly have been true. Rather, he chooses to identify himself with those who are

persecuted in his name. This echoes the statement by Jesus found at the end of the so-called Beatitudes: “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me” (Matt. 5:11). There is a special relationship, one between Jesus and those who trust him, who know his voice, who gather together in his name, and who are persecuted because of their faith in him.

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats must be understood in the context of this special identification between Jesus and his followers. Matthew records a similar statement earlier in his Gospel when he recounts Jesus sending out the twelve disciples into the towns of Israel. There Jesus tells them, “If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones *because he is my disciple*, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward” (10:42). Mark records a similar statement in 9:41 with this difference, “anyone who gives a cup of water *in my name*.” Again, this is phraseology that signifies a special relationship. It is not merely speaking of random acts of kindness, no matter how important they may be in the Christian ethic.

It would be wrong to make the teaching found in the Sheep and Goats to apply to random acts of kindness performed by anyone, let alone to stretch the teaching to include a statement on how salvation is earned based on these random acts. Such an interpretation not only ignores the special significance of the terminology of relationship found therein, but it also ignores the overall scope of the teaching of Jesus.

3.3.2.2.4 Is Ignorance an Excuse?

“That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows” (Luke 12:47-48a).

What do pluralists and inclusivists make of this teaching from the Parable of the Wicked Servant? Their arguments have always been that a direct knowledge, a cognitive awareness of Jesus, is not necessary for a person to live a reconciled and pleasing life before God. Putting aside whether this is biblically solid or not, it does seem clear from the above teaching of Jesus that people can be judged for things they do not even know. If they have, in essence, participated in “things deserving punishment” and did not believe those activities to be evil or wrong, they may still be judged for said actions. All of the servants are beaten in the parable, and knowledge does account for something, as the ones who knew what they did was wrong were beaten more severely than the ones who did not know.

Conversely, this parable could be argued as a positive point for those who support the notion that cognitive awareness of Jesus is unnecessary. If God will punish people for things they did wrong and did not know it, surely he will reward people for things they did right, even when they did not know they were the right things to do. Tying this argument in with the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, where people of the nations are rewarded for acts of kindness they did even when they did not realise they were being credited with them, seems to make a rock solid argument in the favour of the pluralist and inclusivist.

Or does it? To begin with, the current parable says nothing about being rewarded for things done in ignorance that were positive and good. In other words, just because it teaches that ignorance is no excuse when it comes to doing punishable acts, it cannot be stretched to conclude the converse, that ignorance when good things are done will be credited as righteousness. The parable simply does not teach that. And it has already been noted with the Sheep and Goats that how one acts with regard to the children of the kingdom of God is the point there, not just random acts of kindness. In short, it would be a false conclusion to take these two parables and state that people who do not know Jesus or have any cognitive awareness of his teachings and his work on the cross will earn salvation by simply doing good works. The pluralist and the inclusivist stretch the teaching found in these parables too far when they make such conclusions.²¹⁶

3.3.2.2.5 The Narrow and Wide Roads

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matt. 7:13-14).

There may be no single more ignored statement by pluralists and inclusivists than this statement by Jesus. The Parable of the Narrow Door is one of the stronger passages in the Gospels in support of an exclusivist position.²¹⁷ One of the frequent arguments used against exclusivists is that their soteriological point-of-view is too narrow and limiting. They are told that God is a God of love and forgiveness and grace, and that the door to salvation must be broad and wide. Anything less than a salvation that is virtually universal in scope and

²¹⁶ Sanders (*Three Views*, 143) comments on this passage: “God holds people accountable for what they have been given, not for what they have failed to hear (Lk. 12:48).” However, it is difficult to see how Sanders has adequately dealt with this passage. The servants who did not know were still punished. That is the clear teaching in this parable.

²¹⁷ Incredibly, in the very thorough treatment of four views concerning salvation (Okholm and Phillips), neither Matthew’s nor Luke’s account of this parable is mentioned anywhere.

outcome is demeaning not only to well-meaning, sincere people of other faiths, but more dramatically, demeaning to God himself.

However appealing a “wide road to life” may be to many Christians, it is difficult to reconcile with the above words of Jesus. The literal meaning of the above words is impossible to escape; to attempt some figurative meaning only muddies the waters.²¹⁸ A plain reading of Jesus’ words yields a rather simple picture: there are two gates and two roads that are contrasted. For each gate and accompanying road, there is a destination and there are travellers. For the destination that is destruction, the gate is wide and the road broad, and many travel via that way. For the destination that is life, the gate is small and the road narrow, and few travel via that way.

Much of the benefit of the teaching style of Jesus is that it is so easy to conjure up images of the teaching. In this particular instance, the picture is easy to visualise. The teaching is straightforward and uncluttered. From the very mouth of the one who came to die for the sins of the world, only a few are reckoned to have been saved. The contrast between the “many” and the “few” is unmistakable. So why are so many theologians so willing to ignore this simple teaching?

For example, in Sanders’ extensive work and his subsequent support of inclusivism, he only provides a passing reference to this passage in his exclusivism section (*No Other Name*, 41). There is no interaction with this passage when it comes to his personal support of inclusivism. Similarly, Clark Pinnock does not even mention the passage in *The Openness of God*, a book where it should naturally be addressed. To be fair, Pinnock does mention it elsewhere, albeit again giving the passage rather short shrift. In *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, Pinnock says this passage has nothing to do with the relative numbers of people spending an eternity in one of two places. Rather, “Jesus is warning the disciples away from speculation and urging them to choose the hard and unpopular path” (154). He then says this statement was made by Jesus when his disciples were few in number and “the conditions were arduous.”

In concluding his brief comments about the passage, Pinnock says: “I do not think that this text about fewness can be used to cancel out the optimism of salvation that so many other verses articulate” (154). In essence, then, he decides to sweep the passage aside because “so many other verses” seem to contradict it. However, “so many other verses” from the mouth of Jesus speak about God’s judgment, so even the basis of Pinnock’s conclusion, i.e., number of optimistic passages versus pessimistic ones, is questionable.

²¹⁸ For example, see Fritz Guy in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 44.

This seems to be a somewhat familiar tack taken by non-exclusivists when it comes to Matthew 7:13-14. Reformed pastor Neal Punt favourably quotes Lorraine Boettner, a post-millennialist, when Boettner states that “there is no more reason to conclude from the parable of the Two Ways that the saved shall be few compared to the lost than to suppose that the parable of the Ten Virgins teaches that they shall be precisely equal in number.” On the same page, Punt himself notes that the statement “‘those who find it are few’ is not a numerical calculation of the extent of the atonement. It is an exhortation: to covet salvation as a rare, invaluable treasure; to forsake all other interests in order to attain the desired end.”²¹⁹ In other words, a saying from Jesus that speaks about the few and the many really is not talking about the few and the many.

What about Luke 13:22-30? Here is another “narrow door” statement by Jesus, but this time it is in direct response to the question, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” (vs. 23). Punt notes that Jesus never answered the question. “Nothing is gained by speculating about “few” and “many.” Jesus himself refused to be drawn into a discussion about this” (28).²²⁰ However, if Punt is correct, then Jesus basically just ignored the question altogether if the following verses are not intended to be an answer to the question. Rather, Jesus mentions the narrow door and even notes that “*many* . . . will try to enter and will not be able to” (vs. 24). Is this not an answer to the question?²²¹

At the heart of Jesus’ response lies an absence of relationship on the part of the people who do not make it through the narrow door. A time is coming when the door will be closed, and no matter how hard the people knock, they will not be allowed to get in. Twice the owner of the house tells the shut-out knockers, “I don’t know you” (vss. 25, 27), and once these people have missed their opportunity to pass through the narrow door, they are reckoned with the “evildoers” (vs. 27). All attempts to keep this parable at arm’s length and not interpret it as dealing with the very question originally asked of Jesus are impotent answers.

Clearly, the question, “Are only a few people going to be saved?” is a difficult one. However, here is right in the Gospels a direct answer to the question, from the Lord Jesus

²¹⁹ Neal Punt, *Unconditional Good News: Toward an Understanding of Biblical Universalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980) 29.

²²⁰ Universalist J.A.T. Robinson concluded similarly. “When the Lord Jesus was asked whether only a few are saved, he did not answer the question but instead called for a faith decision on the part of the audience (Luke 13:23-24)” (*No Other Name*, 105).

²²¹ Interestingly, Pinnock looks at this passage briefly but only comments on the last two verses. “People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God” (vs. 29) is taken to show the “optimism of salvation” present in the Gospels (*Wideness*, 153). Incredibly, Pinnock ignores the full context of this statement, concentrating on any optimistic note he can find, while ignoring the pessimistic qualities.

himself, and still inclusivists are asking the question as if it has not been answered. One is hard pressed to find any satisfactory answer from universalists, pluralists, or inclusivists when it comes to the exclusivist's use of this passage and his teaching that few, indeed, will be saved. Taking these two Narrow Door statements together, they seem to indeed involve numbers. It should be agreed with Punt that speculating about these things is not fruitful, but it is not speculating when the words of the Saviour are so clear. There are two gates and two roads, and all people travel one or the other. To attempt to fix numerical values on "few" and "many" is indeed fruitless, but to note that one road is much more travelled than the other is reasonable to conclude from the passages.

What should be made of Boettner's statement, "There is no more reason to conclude from the parable of the Two Ways that the saved shall be few compared to the lost than to suppose that the parable of the Ten Virgins teaches that they shall be precisely equal in number?" The problem is, in a nutshell, that the Parable of the Ten Virgins is not speaking about the same thing as the Narrow Door statements. With the Ten Virgins, Jesus is talking about preparedness. With the Narrow Door, he answers a specific question about relative numbers of the saved and the damned.

This can be put another way. If the vast majority of humanity were to end up in heaven, as say the universalists, pluralists, and inclusivists, would the Narrow Door statements make any sense? Could Jesus say that narrow is the road that leads to destruction and that many travel that road, when in actuality the vast majority of humans are saved? It would be much better for their case if the Matthew passage read as follows: "For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and *few* enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and *many* find it."²²²

Of course, the statement does not say this at all, but precisely the opposite is said. There is simply no way around it, when Jesus combines narrow and small with fewness, he is meaning to convey the message of restriction. It is no wonder that those who disagree with exclusivism ignore this passage or give a quick nod and an equally quick answer for it. The juxtaposition of "small, narrow, and few" with "wide, broad, and many" does indeed convey the feeling of relative numbers. To then conclude that it does not, or to somehow ignore these

²²² The words "few" and "many" have been interchanged in the verses but the narrow and broad references have been left intact. However, as can be easily seen, doing so leaves the passage with a bit of "poetic" imbalance. To have many people travelling a narrow road and few people on a broad one leaves the statement disproportioned. It would be better to either make the road to destruction similarly narrow, or to leave it broad and say "*but few...*" instead of "*and few...*," if a balanced picture is maintained. In other words, the most natural reading of the statement by Jesus combines a narrowness with fewness.

words and swallow them up with “optimistic” passages does not do justice to the words of Christ.

A theologian who states “few will enter heaven, but many will enter hell” is doing nothing more than repeating what Jesus has already said. Theologians who state “many will enter heaven and few will enter hell” are only twisting the words of Jesus to suit their own presuppositions and preconceptions. Scripture has little good to say about such teachers.

Luke’s account ends with the stark teaching that many who believed themselves to be in the favour of God will stand by and watch others pass them by. Jesus combines three familiar elements from his judgment teachings in his concluding remarks to this parable. Firstly, there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth,” a sure sign of conscious suffering on the part of those who have been shut out. Secondly, the imagery of a feast is used to convey the understanding that those who have passed through the narrow door will, along with the great Old Testament patriarchs and benefactors of the covenant, enjoy a great celebration with the owner of the house, while those who are shut out, while thinking themselves to be firmly in the covenantal people of God, will find themselves “feastless.” Thirdly, “those who are last will be first, and the first will be last” (what Travis calls “eschatological reversal,” 1986:131) includes another popular expression of Jesus to signify a humbling aspect to this judgment.

The Parable of the Narrow Door, then, stands as one of the bedrock exclusivist passages. The separation into only two types of people – those who enter the narrow door and those who are eventually shut out – is a frequent teaching of Jesus. But with this parable, Jesus provides a glimpse into how this separation will appear in terms of number. With the Parable of the Sheep and Goats, it states why they are separated. With the Narrow Gate, it states the relative number of the separation and no matter how difficult to accept (as much of the teaching of Jesus is), he states that only a “few” enter the narrow door, whereas “many” are shut out.

3.3.2.2.6 Summary for the Parables

In the parables, Jesus spends a fair amount of time speaking about positive things, like the wonderful qualities of the kingdom of God, or the persistent love of the Father for the lost. But he also spends a large amount of time concentrating on negative matters, like unfaithful stewardship or selfish and self-righteous attitudes, and how these will be judged. Both elements of love and mercy, along with elements of wrath and judgment, play an integral part in the parables of Jesus.

The aim has been to show that, contrary to popular opinion, Jesus did not only speak about the positive, the touchy-feely elements of love and forgiveness that many take to mean people should feel good about themselves. Rather, Jesus spoke at length about the scary, the awful, the ominous, and he did this in one of his favourite forms of teaching, parables. And he did this over the entire time of his ministry, from the beginning to the end of it.²²³

There is no question that such teaching was important to Jesus, and it should likewise be important to modern readers. To speak of such judgment is to not attempt to “scare people into the kingdom,” but rather to tell them the simple reality of things. Modern statements concerning the teaching of Jesus should contain this element. If they do not, then the message is not being faithful to the words of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus is pictured as the Great Shepherd, often what is seen is him caring for his sheep, not separating the sheep from the goats for judgment. The common Medieval portrait of Jesus was that of Judge, coming with his angels to exact wrath and justice upon sinful humans. That image is appalling to most sensitive consciences today. Perhaps, in reaction to such depictions of Jesus, some have tended to emphasise his loving-kindness, his mercy and forgiveness, as if some false dichotomy exists between a Shepherd who cares for his sheep and one who separates sheep from goats, or a harvester who grows wheat as opposed to one who destroys the weeds in the process, or a fisherman who picks through the fish and keeps the good ones, necessarily discarding the ones he finds unacceptable.

But there need be no false dichotomy, no playing of one portrait against the other. This is, after all, what good shepherds, farmers, and fishermen do, they discern between the good and the bad of their produce and make judgments of separation. What needs to be taught is not the Medieval portrait of Jesus as Righteous and Angry Judge to the exclusion of the Good Shepherd who loves and cares for his flock, nor is it the modern picture of Jesus as meek and mild teacher who never harmed a fly, to the exclusion of the Son of Man who will come on the clouds and judge the nations. What is needed is *both* portraits because both are given in Scripture, particularly from the very teaching of Jesus about himself. The condemnation of Jesus against the Pharisees as blind guides and wicked tenants turns against those who do not proclaim the full, complete portrait of Jesus as found in the Scriptures.²²⁴

²²³ “Nothing is more plainly taught in Scripture than that there will be a final and universal judgment” (Blanchard, *Hell*, 102). He then notes that *two-thirds* of the parables of Jesus relate to the subject. J. I Packer notes in *Knowing God*, “The entire New Testament is overshadowed by the certainty of a coming day of judgment” (Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1973) 155.

²²⁴ “Surely it is not the business of the Church to adapt Christ to men, but to adapt men to Christ” (Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos*, Sophia Institute, 1974, 25). This same sentiment was echoed nearly 200 years ago by Claus Harms, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says, Do penance, He wills that men should conform to

3.3.2.3 Other Select Teachings of Jesus

The remainder of time will be spent on miscellaneous, yet important, teachings from Jesus as they relate to inclusivism and its portrayal of the teaching of Christ.

3.3.2.3.1 The Good and Bad Trees

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them” (Matt. 7:15-20; see also Matt. 12:33; Luke 6:43-45).

Jesus again makes a distinction between two classes or types of people. As he did earlier with the sheep and goats, or the good fish and bad fish, or the wheat and weeds, now he categorises people either as good trees or bad trees. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus provides this categorisation, in context, as a test for false prophets, but in Luke’s account, which actually conflates the separate teachings found in Matthew, the good and bad trees are used in the context of judging others.

It would be tempting to make this statement in the Sermon a general rule which would apply to the salvation of individuals. In fact, Pinnock cites this passage when he provides two criteria for recognising truth in non-Christian religions (*Wideness*, 97). However, this appropriation of the text seems misplaced, since Jesus is using the good trees and bad trees metaphor to expose false prophets. He is not using it as a rule to determine who among the religions of the world are approved in the eyes of God. “By their fruit you will recognise them” refers to false prophets in context.²²⁵

Nor should this passage be taken and played against other statements made by Jesus, or elsewhere in Scripture. Jesus is not implying that a person’s fruit is all that ultimately matters, as if what a person actually believes or professes is of no consequence. This seems to be how inclusivists use this passage, but that would be a mistake. Elsewhere in the Gospels

His doctrine; He does not conform the doctrine according to men, as they do now according to the spirit of the age.” Quoted in James Martin, *The Last Judgment*, 163.

²²⁵ Nineteenth-century, Anglican minister J. C. Ryle sees an intimate connection between this passage and the one preceding it, the “narrow and wide gates” passage. He notes that one way to avoid the wide road is to avoid false teachers. “There are thousands who seem ready to believe anything in religion if they hear it from an ordained minister. . . . What is the best safeguard against false teaching? Beyond all doubt the regular study of the Word of God, with prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit” (*Matthew*, J. I. Packer and Alister McGrath (eds.) [Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993] 52).

and New Testament epistles criteria for recognising false teachers is found which involve not only behaviour but doctrine as well. The ethical test, then, should never be played against a doctrinal one, as if the former is all that really matters.

Jesus' argument seems to be that false prophets, "wolves in sheep's clothing," will ultimately be exposed by their actions. They may be able to fake genuine repentance and belief, but in time, "what a man really is will inevitably show itself by the way he lives" (France, 1985:147). Many will come and lead people away from Christ, and one way – not the only way, but one way – to judge them is based on their fruit. Although Jesus does not provide more specifics about this fruit, some conclusions from his broader teaching can be made, such as a forgiving heart, care for the poor and downtrodden, and belief "in spirit and in truth" of the one, true God.²²⁶

However, must the usage of this passage only be limited to false prophets? Is there not something that can be gleaned from the text to apply more generally to all people? It seems that there is, but this passage must not be wrenched from its context, no matter how tempting. Again, the passage is not stating that people will be justified in the eyes of God by producing good fruit, anymore than it can be pressed to say that a bad person must *always* be bad and can have no hope of repentance and forgiveness.²²⁷ It is merely stating that one test of a person and his or her faith is evidence of ethical behaviour. That test can indeed apply more broadly to all people.

Christian profession is for all intents and purposes much easier than Christian living. In fact, Jesus moves from this passage in the Sermon to the "Lord, Lord" passage which proves that professed discipleship will not be enough. James makes a similar argument when he asks, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? . . . Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (Jms. 2:14, 18b). Believers who mouth empty words of supposed profession are exposed by how they actually live. Again, this does not say that they are justified by how they live, but rather, the genuineness of their profession of faith is either proved or disproved by their actions. True faith yields true works of righteousness, "faith without works is dead" (Jms. 2:17).

Again, the negative use of this principle is far different than the positive one. Is a person's profession of faith is genuine? Look at that person's works. There should be some

²²⁶ In fact, the definition of this "fruit" would go a long way in determining how to apply this passage. Pluralists and inclusivists tend to narrow it down to "good works," whatever that may be given a certain religion and its definition, thus justifying their conclusion that non-Christian religions can either be salvific, or lead people to faith in Christ. But this is only filling the term "fruit" with meaning that may in fact be foreign to the meaning of Jesus.

²²⁷ After all, there is no statement here by Jesus that a bad tree can ever become a good tree, or vice versa.

correlation between faith and works. Those who do not have genuine faith will ultimately be exposed by their lack of good works. This is the negative use of the principle, the way Jesus is actually using it.

However, some people take this argument and turn it on its head. They say if you look at a person who produces good works, then that person must have genuine faith. But this is not what Jesus is saying, and it would be wise to not apply it in this reverse manner. This is how pluralists and inclusivists generally use this passage. Again, Jesus is using this principle to expose false prophets, not necessarily to prove genuine faith, and most definitely not to prove that people in other religions are justified by their good works.

Lastly, as it relates specifically to the matter of Jesus and his teaching concerning the judgment of God, the bad trees are burned. His words echo verbatim those of John the Baptist earlier in the Gospel, “every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt. 3:10). A time of judgment is coming, and bad trees will be cut down and burned. John the Baptist attacked superficial repentance, and Jesus does much the same thing.

The basis of this “burning” is that the tree does not produce any good fruit. This teaching is similar to the Parable of the Barren Fig Tree, as well as the acted-out parable of Jesus and the withering fig tree, to which will be seen shortly. An unproductive tree is wasting soil, and the owner of the orchard does not tolerate such trees for too long. However, in context, it must not be forgotten that this lack of productivity is concerning someone who has professed faith (in this specific case, a false prophet), or in the broader sense given the exact words of John the Baptist, a person who has a false repentance. Profession and production are intimately linked here and should not be separated.

3.3.2.3.2 Who Will Jesus Disown before the Father?

“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household” (Matt. 10:32-36, see also Luke 12:8-9, 49-53).

Here is yet another statement of judgment from Jesus. The one pictured standing with open arms, ready to accept each and every one no matter whether they like it or not, speaks of

actually disowning people before the Father in heaven. Again, as in other instances, the issue is an acknowledgement of his person. It is not that Jesus speaks about the wrath of the Father that is amazing, but that this judgment is directly tied to the person of Jesus himself. The Father certainly will judge the adulterer, the murderer, and the liar, but he will equally judge the individual who rejects his Son.

The sword Jesus pictures here is a figurative portrayal of cutting, splitting, division.²²⁸ Jesus knew what his message would bring, and still he delivered it. The message of the Son of Man was not one that would unite all of humanity into a sort of global group hug. Rather, it would divide people, even in individual households. The message of Christ brings with it crucial finality and a need to make a decision. It is an either/or message. To attempt to ignore it is itself a decision to choose condemnation. Each and every person not only must make such a decision, but has already made one.

There is no neutrality in the message of Christ. Each human being stands at a crossroads at the centre of which is Jesus, and he is pointing to the way of life. Judgment falls not only upon those who choose the wrong path, but it even falls upon those who attempt to stand in one place and not choose. The verdict of acceptance or rejection rises and falls with the person of Jesus Christ and what is made of that person. He who has an intimate relationship with the Father is entrusted with such a judgment, to either recommend or oppose the travellers on the two roads.

The question that needs to be answered, then, is if individuals are “acknowledging” (Greek: *homologeō*; KJV has “confess”) Jesus. *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* (120) gives a more thorough understanding of how this word is used specifically in the Matthew and Luke passages in question:

“In Matt. 10:32 and Luke 12:8 the construction of this verb with *en*, “in,” followed by the dative case of the personal pronoun, has a special significance, namely, to “confess” in a person’s name, the nature of the “confession” being determined by the context, the suggestion being to make a public “confession.” Thus the statement, “every one . . . who shall confess Me (lit., “in Me,” i.e., in My case) before men, him (lit., “in him,” i.e., in his case) will I also confess before My Father . . . ,” conveys the thought of “confessing” allegiance to Christ as one’s Master and Lord, and, on the other hand, of acknowledgment, on His

²²⁸ The parallel passage in Luke 12:51-52 bears this out: “Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.”

part, of the faithful one as being His worshipper and servant, His loyal follower; this is appropriate to the original idea in *homologeō* of being identified in thought or language.”

Jesus promises to acknowledge to the Father those who have faithfully followed him, whereas he warns of denying or not acknowledging those who have not faithfully followed him. In light of this fact, it would seem highly tenuous for one to claim to be acknowledging Jesus while at the same time rejecting a large portion of his teaching, as many inclusivists appear to do.

The very judgment of God rests upon the person of Jesus. Heaven and hell lay in the balance, and the ultimate destiny of each individual is to be determined by his acknowledgement or rejection of the person of Jesus. This is much more than many Christian scholars are willing to admit when it comes to the person of Jesus. For them, Jesus is only a good man or a wise teacher. He is not an individual upon whom eternal fates ultimately rest, let alone the “Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8). He is simply a good man with good teachings, a moral pointer showing a superior way of life, an ethical figure emulating a charitable way to behave. Eternal destinies no more rise and fall with him than they would with any individual bent on teaching some simple, spiritual truths by which to live. To embrace him personally is to embrace his teaching; to embrace his teaching is to embrace him personally. A person cannot do one to the exclusion of the other, nor can an individual ignore one and assume that the other is valid. Jesus does not say “if you acknowledge my teaching,” but “if you acknowledge *me*.” An acceptance of his personal claims about himself lies at the heart of his recommendation to the Father of particular individuals.

It should also be noted that the two statements stand in corollary to each other. It cannot be concluded that Jesus is only talking about the acknowledgement of his teachings anymore than it could be concluded by him denying someone that he is only denying that individual’s teaching but not his very person. This would also make sense of the fact that Jesus remarks that “no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt. 11:27). For someone to know the Father, that person must know the Son. For someone to have a relationship with the Father, that person must have a relationship with the Son.²²⁹

This has intimate application for the inclusivist understanding that explicit knowledge of Jesus is unnecessary in order to receive his benefits. There is a qualitative difference between

²²⁹ Such a teaching not only contradicts the pluralist’s contentions about the person of Jesus, it also contradicts the inclusivist’s idea of “anonymous Christians.”

what Jesus professes about salvation and knowledge of his person, and what the great leaders of other world religions have professed. It appears, then, that the inclusivist understanding concerning salvation and the person of Jesus is untenable given the teaching that Jesus himself provides.

3.3.2.4 Jesus and His Actions

Many if not the majority of studies concerning the life of Jesus really do not concern his “life” at all, but concentrate more on his sayings. However, it is one thing to say that Jesus spoke about the wrath and judgment of God, but quite another to show that he also acted it out in certain instances. New Testament scholar John Meier is correct when he states, “The ‘Quest’ must encompass not only the words of Jesus but his works as well” (*Marginal*, vol. 1, 168, n. 8). This is certainly a valid point to make.

For this study, two key actions by Jesus that communicate the judgment of God will be considered: the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree.

3.3.2.4.1 The Cleansing of the Temple

(Matt. 21:12-16; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-47; John 2:13-16)

It is not within the scope of this study to consider the arguments for whether there are two temple cleansing incidents in the life of Jesus, or just one. The fact still remains that there is at least one such incident.²³⁰ For many, the picture of the meek and mild Saviour taking up cords and whipping people, or overturning their tables and showing little regard for their private property, goes completely against their accepted portrait of Jesus. For many, Jesus never condemned, he never mistreated, he never judged, but always tolerated and accepted and loved. The temple cleansing is yet another blight on their tolerance-loving portrayal of Jesus.

Such righteous anger coming from the Lord, though, is completely in line with his teaching and his life in general. He has come to the temple in Jerusalem to worship, and there he finds the temple has become a marketplace. In both the Synoptic accounts and John’s, Jesus has come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. This solemn day stood at the pinnacle of the Jewish religious calendar. But what does Jesus find when he comes to the temple? He finds that it has been overrun by bankers and cattle herders. Certainly there was a need for the

²³⁰ All three Synoptic Gospels have the temple cleansing at the end of Jesus’ ministry, during the last week. Only John puts it at the beginning. This has left some to conclude that there are two separate yet similar incidents, while others simply conclude that, although the temple cleansing occurred in the last week of Jesus’ ministry, John places it at the beginning for theological reasons. Certain differences within the two accounts also lead some to look for two separate incidents.

selling of sacrificial animals to those Jews who had travelled far distances for the Passover, as there was a need for the exchanging of foreign currency into the local one. However, this should not have been done in the outer court of the temple, but should have been handled outside the temple altogether. That the house of the Lord had been overrun by these marketers was too much for Jesus to bear.

His outburst seems almost too violent. Would it not have been better or more appropriate for Jesus to reason with the people, or to make a public declaration of his contempt for the practise, than to become physically agitated and create the possibility for physical harm to befall those in the temple? Evidently not. What Jesus saw warranted such action because it was the very character of God that was at stake.²³¹ “How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market?” (John 2:16). A place meant to bring glory to God was only bringing profit to the hawkers. Such practises are perhaps one of the many reasons why, as Paul says in quoting the prophets, “God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Rom. 2:24).

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, R.V.G. Tasker notes: “It would seem very inadequate to regard the action of Jesus on this occasion as something which any zealous prophet eager to reform the worship of his day might have felt moved to do.”²³² He then notes that John couples this event with the prediction of Jesus raising up his “temple” in three days after its destruction. The cleansing of the temple is meant to convey the intention of Jesus when it comes to the entire sacrificial system. The Jews demand a sign of his authority to cleanse the temple, and the sign Jesus offers them is nothing less than his resurrection to come. So this temple cleansing is a sign of judgment upon the faulty sacrificial system of his day, replete with hypocritical money-makers serving as religious authorities.

But this cleansing also prefigures what Jesus will do in the future. “Let us see in our Lord’s conduct on this occasion a striking picture of what he will do when he comes again the second time. He will purify his visible church as he purified the temple; he will cleanse it from everything that defiles and works iniquity, and drive out everyone who claims to be a Christian but is still of the world” (Ryle, *Matthew*, 194). Many will come to him at that time and expect to be welcomed with open arms, but their cries of “Lord, Lord” will be met with righteous judgment. As they nonchalantly swagger into the temple, they will be met with whips on their backs.

²³¹ “When an essential truth of God is on the line, Jesus takes off the kid gloves and speaks very directly” (John Armstrong (ed.) *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1996] 108).

²³² *John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1968) 62. Jesus “regarded all belief in Him as superficial which does not have as its most essential elements the consciousness of the need for forgiveness and the conviction that He alone is the Mediator of that forgiveness” (65).

There seem to be two competing images when it comes to portrayals of the character of Jesus. One is a lamb, the other a lion. Universalists and pluralists tend to disregard the image of the Christ as a lion, inclusivists tend to give it little to no sway, while exclusivists appear to emphasise it at times to the exclusion of the lamb figure. Both images, though, must be given their just due. In a similar way, the disciples emphasised the Messianic Davidic King figure while completely ignoring the Suffering Servant image. The whole time they looked for Jesus to overthrow the Roman oppression, they missed his teaching that he must die first. In Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ, Matthew follows up that account with Peter's objection to Jesus' claim that he must first die (Matt. 16:21f). Peter could not envision the Messiah suffering and dying. He expected the Davidic King, not the Suffering Servant. He looked for the lion and missed the lamb.

Many Christian scholars today do exactly the opposite. They look for the lamb and miss the lion. They speak of the loving-kindness of Jesus, his tolerant gentleness and care for sinners, and rightly so. But they deny that he is also a righteous judge. The lamb who had come to take away the sins of the world is also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The two images correspond with the two advents of the Christ. In the first advent he came as a lamb and laid his life down as an atoning sacrifice for sins. During the second advent he will come as a lion to judge the world.²³³

How can the lamb topple tables and act like a madman?²³⁴ Because he is consumed with zeal for God's holiness. Jesus was obsessed with it, and he still is. Everything deemed unclean and unworthy will be cast out. John the Baptist foretold of one who was coming who would "baptise with fire" (Matt. 3:10-12; Luke 3:16-17) and Jesus is that person. The incident of the temple cleansing, then, is not an anomaly in the life of Jesus, an abnormal state of behaviour in an otherwise calm and cool demeanour. The temple cleansing is indicative of the ministry of Jesus and what he came to do. It is a defining moment of his ministry. He came to deal with sin, either by laying his life down as a lamb, or by judging it as a lion. In both ways he will deal with sin. To cause one image to consume the other is a gross error. Both images have their place in the ministry of the Messiah.

²³³ Revelation 6:16 warns of the wrath of the lamb, a rather paradoxical picture.

²³⁴ John Hick actually uses this event as one of several examples for why he believes Jesus to not be sinless (*Metaphor*, 77).

3.3.2.4.2 The Cursing of the Fig Tree

(Matt. 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-24)

Directly following the account of the temple cleansing is what is commonly called the cursing of the fig tree. The well-known twentieth-century atheist Bertrand Russell noted this incident and cited it as one reason why he believed the teaching of Jesus to be flawed and to point to a certain moral defect in his character. To curse a tree that could not bear fruit is “curious” according to Russell, who obviously missed the whole point of the account.²³⁵ And it is no wonder. The atheist Russell would have no concern or conception of what it means to be zealous for the holiness of God.²³⁶

Jesus, however, knew precisely what it meant to be zealous for the Lord. In stark contrast lay the religious leaders and teachers of the law who were more concerned for their own interests. The incident of the cursing of the fig tree, when coupled with the temple cleansing and found in the context of Jesus’ judgment of Jerusalem (see Luke 19:41-44), makes perfectly good sense when understood as an acted-out parable concerning the judgment of Israel.²³⁷ The Messiah has come to Israel and has expected fruit. The people of God, however, are more concerned with their own interests.

The image of Israel as a fig tree comes from the Old Testament (eg., Hos. 9:10, Nah. 3:12, and Mic. 7:1). In Mark’s account, the cleansing of the temple is sandwiched between the two parts of the account of the fig tree. Both accounts are meant to portray judgment. “The tree gave outward promise of fruit but disappointed the Lord; so its punishment was to remain eternally fruitless – in a sense this was but a perpetuation of its present condition” (Cole, 176). Just as Jesus came to the temple and found no fruit, so too with the fig tree. Both are symbols of the judgment of Israel.

The temptation will again be to limit the application of these accounts to Israel, or to the hypocritical religious leaders of Jesus’ day, and to not extend the application to the modern-day generation. This would be a fatal mistake. As the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees showed, much that Jesus had to say in condemnation of the Pharisees sticks to

²³⁵ Russell’s conclusion about the moral character of Jesus: “I cannot myself feel that either in the matter of wisdom or in the matter of virtue Christ stands quite as high as some other people known to history. I think I should put Buddha and Socrates above Him in those respects.” He also cites the Gadarene demoniac incident, where Jesus sends the demons into the herd of pigs, as another example of the morally defective character of Christ (*Why I am Not a Christian*, electronic colophon, <http://www.users.drew.edu/~jlenz/whynot.html>).

²³⁶ “In the age of Greenpeace and animal rights the idea that Jesus of Nazareth sentenced two thousand pigs, one of the more intelligent mammals, to death by drowning by allowing demons to invade and terrorize them raises problems for most readers” (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Peter Davids, F. F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch, [*Hard Sayings of the Bible*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996] 372).

²³⁷ “If this is seen as an acted parable with reference to Israel, it drops into place at once” (Alan R. Cole, *Mark* [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989] 180).

people today as well. Similarly, when Jesus warns of the plight of fruitless trees, whether in an acted parable such as this one, or in a direct teaching as found in the Sermon on the Mount, close notice should be given. The image of a tree and its fruit or lack thereof was a common teaching by Jesus. Such trees are uprooted and burned and are of no use to the master.

Likewise, when Jesus comes to the temple that is the human heart, those things which he does not find comely to such a temple will be driven out. Israel had the impression of great religious concern with outward profession of faith in God. But inside she was foul and unclean. The fig tree appeared from a distance to be fruitful, but upon closer inspection it bore no fruit. Jesus cursed such a tree, and he can be expected to do the same today.

Those who might object to the moral implications of the “non-environmentalist attitude” of Jesus cursing a tree have missed the point of the acted parable. After all, what is a tree when compared to the holiness of the divine tree maker? The withering of the fig tree points to the withering of Jerusalem, who was about to reject her Messiah. The account is followed by the Parable of the Two Sons, the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, and the Parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew’s Gospel, all strongly judgmental parables. Mark also follows it with the Parable of the Wicked Tenants. At the heart of the judgment of Israel and her religious establishment is her rejection of the Messiah. The two go hand in hand. The rejection of the person of Jesus earns banishment to hell. Therefore, to limit these judgment teachings to the first-century would be to make a fundamental mistake. A rejection of the Messiah, whether in the first century or twenty centuries later, will yield the same result.

3.3.3 Judgment in the Person of Jesus

It may be surprising to some who read the Gospels that many Christian scholars debate whether or not Jesus expected a coming judgment or end time.²³⁸ A simple reading of the Gospels reveals that he did indeed expect some cataclysmic end of the world.²³⁹ Whether this was to be imminent or in the future is up for debate,²⁴⁰ but that he expected it should not be

²³⁸ In quoting M. J. Borg, Reiser notes that “only a minority of Jesus scholars active in North America believes that Jesus was eschatological” (1997:3). But as Reiser himself notes, “The noneschatological Jesus is a phantom and a product of wishful thinking” (6).

²³⁹ “The strongest support for the doctrine of Endless Punishment is the teaching of Christ, the Redeemer of man. . . . The mere perusal of Christ’s words when he was upon earth, without comment upon them, will convince the unprejudiced that the Redeemer of sinners knew and believed that for impenitent men and devils there is an endless punishment” (William Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897] 12).

²⁴⁰ While John Meier in *A Marginal Jew* maintains that Jesus did expect a coming end to the age, he argues that the ‘imminent’ eschatological passages such as Matt. 10:23, Mark 9:1 and 13:30 were creations by the early church and that Jesus looked to a judgment in the distant future (Doubleday, vol. 2, 347). However, why would the early church create words for Jesus that make him appear in error?

denied, although many scholars do precisely that.²⁴¹ This point is beyond the scope of this work. However, New Testament scholar John Meier in his three-volume magnum opus, *A Marginal Jew*, studies the matter extensively in his second volume. His conclusion is: “A completely un-eschatological Jesus, a Jesus totally shorn of all apocalyptic traits, is simply not the historical Jesus, however compatible he might be to modern tastes, at least in middle-class American academia” (317).²⁴²

The reason why many scholars do not believe Jesus spoke with apocalyptic expectations is because people tend to equate lunatics with someone who articulates a coming, cataclysmic catastrophe of cosmic proportions. Madmen stand on the street corner and proclaim the world is ending soon. Such a picture of the good teacher or godly religious figure of Jesus does not jibe well with these conceptions of doomsday preachers. However, as Meier notes, there is simply too much data in the Gospels to explain away the fact that Jesus spoke of a coming judgment, an end times.

The “day of judgment” (for example, Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36, plus other statements by Jesus simply referring to “the judgment”) is a prominent phrase in the teaching of Jesus and points to this eschatological awareness by him. A time is coming, so expects Jesus, when everything and everyone will be judged. Even the most seemingly insignificant matter will be judged. “But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken” (Matt. 12:36). If this statement is taken at all seriously, most people should shudder at the thought. And the use of “careless” by Jesus connotes a negative, not a positive, judgment at that time.

Over forty years ago Baird lamented about the paucity of talk about judgment when speaking about Jesus: “A rediscovery of the prophetic doctrine of God as revealed in the life and words of Jesus . . . is the greatest single need in the field of modern theology” (1963:13). Unfortunately, modern theology has continued to ignore this important aspect of the teaching of Jesus.

Another familiar statement by Jesus concerns his judgment of those cities who, upon seeing his many miracles, still refused to follow him or to welcome his disciples. Jesus says that those towns or villages that do not welcome the disciples can expect judgment, even greater than that experienced by Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:11-15).

²⁴¹ Baird notes in his comments about the “de-eschatologizing of the gospel” that from the time of Schweitzer’s “Quest” (1906) two opposite extremes have competed on this plane. The one, following Schweitzer, removes all eschatological framework from the teaching of Jesus by saying it was a later fabrication by the early church, while the other extreme following C. H. Dodd’s “realised eschatology” says that the eschaton has already come.

²⁴² Meier covers the Lord’s Supper, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Beatitudes among what amounts to nearly 300 pages (237-506) of eschatological coverage.

In a fuller, yet similar statement later in Matthew's Gospel, this account is given:

“Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you” (Matt. 11:20-24).

This is a striking statement, especially given the fact that Sodom and Gomorrah are referred to more often throughout the Scriptures for their judgment than any other cities in the entire Bible.²⁴³ Jesus makes similar condemnations on the cities of Korazin and Bethsaida (in comparison to Tyre and Sidon), and Capernaum, and in a later, more general statement, Jesus condemns his current generation as a whole, while favourably mentioning Nineveh and the Queen of the South (Matt. 12:41-42). So why all this judgment, and why will it be even more severe than for godless cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah?

Jesus says in Matthew 12:42: “Now one greater than Solomon is here.” A rejection of his ministry and person will bring horrible judgment. He had gone through the cities of Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum and performed great miracles. These signs attested to his ministry as coming from God, but the people did not heed the signs. They rejected God's Anointed One, and therefore, they incurred God's judgment. In fact, despite the great sins of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom, those cities will have a judgment more bearable than the cities of Judea which rejected the Christ. Nineveh only had the prophet Jonah come and warn them of God's wrath and they repented. Now the Messiah comes and stands before the people, and they have not heeded God's messenger. In fact, Jesus notes that had Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom seen the miracles that Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had seen, they would have repented.

²⁴³ Outside the Book of Genesis, references to Sodom and Gomorrah and their judgment by God are found in Deut. 29:23; 32:32; Isa. 1:9-10; 3:9; 13:19; Jer. 23:14; 49:18; 50:40; Lam 4:6; Exe. 16:49; Amos 4:11; and Zep. 2:9. Jesus notes the cities in Luke 17:29, and several times in the New Testament epistles Sodom and Gomorrah are used as examples of God's judgment, for example 2 Pet. 2:6, Jude 7, and Rev. 11:8. In some instances, only Sodom is mentioned, but the understanding that it included Gomorrah in the judgment is always assumed.

The issue is the *person* of the Messiah. “One greater than Solomon” has come onto humanity’s scene. Jesus is none other than the long-awaited Christ, God’s Anointed One, but his message has not been received. Already seen in the discussion of the “those who disown me I will disown to the Father” passage was that rejection of the person of Christ is subject to eternal judgment. The teachings of Jesus cannot be separated from his person, as if the two stand apart. As Travis notes, “Both in Paul and in the gospels one’s relationship to Christ (or to God through Christ) is the criterion of judgment; and the ultimate outcome of the judgment is conceived in terms of relationship to Christ” (1986:167).²⁴⁴

Those theologians who boil down Jesus to a few ethical teachings which can be followed by anybody – and are for the most part taught by any religion – then conclude that a person need not profess faith in Jesus Christ to in fact belong to him. One need not even know Jesus to follow his teachings. This is one reason why typically “liberal” scholars go to great pains to empty Jesus of any and all supernatural qualities, particularly as they relate to his claims about his person. If Jesus is indeed God in the flesh, then his person is just as important as his teaching. However, Jesus can be emptied of all deity, his teaching will fall in line with the teaching of any “moral man,” no matter what doctrinal content may be involved.

However, “one greater than Solomon” has come, not one “equal to Solomon.” The question that begs to be answered is, Will people today who reject the Messiah be similarly condemned? And what does it mean to reject the Messiah? Today, there are millions of people who know the teachings of Jesus and choose to reject them, either in part or in full. As it were, they stand in a position similar to Korazin and Bethsaida. They have seen Jesus, his works and his teaching, and they choose to reject him. Why, for example, does Clark Pinnock hesitate to say what will happen to such people, when the teaching of Jesus concerning those who reject him is so clear?

Note that the issue is repentance. The miracles of Jesus were meant, among other things, to cause the people to repent. Jesus claims that even Sodom would have remained to this day had its inhabitants been shown the miracles Jesus performed in Capernaum. But how could Sodom repent if it were not shown the miracles? The answer is obvious: Sodom did not repent, it was not given any special revelation by God to do so, and it stands to this day as an example of God’s judgment of the ungodly. It may also stand as an example contra inclusivism’s and specifically Pinnock’s contention that God will go to any lengths to save people and will not cease pursuing them.

²⁴⁴ Reiser concurs, the person of Jesus Christ is the key in the coming eschatological judgment (1997:198, 201).

A rejection of the person and work of Jesus is a sin in need of repentance and forgiveness, and subject to condemnation if the former two actions are not performed. A distinction can be made between a failure to recognise who Jesus is, and a rejection of him once recognised. This passage seems clearly to involve the latter, not the former.

3.3.4 The Flood of Noah as a Type of Divine Judgment

The Olivet Discourse is the quintessential, eschatological sermon of Jesus in the Gospels (Matt. 24-25; Mark 13:3-37; Luke 21:5-37). Some portions of it have already been seen when the Parables of the Wise Servant, Ten Virgins, Talents, and Sheep and Goats were considered. This sermon is placed near the end of the ministry of Jesus in all three Synoptic Gospels and as such, forms the final warnings about the end times from the lips of Jesus before his crucifixion. Three major themes run through this discourse: the description of the end of the age, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the coming of the Christ.

After providing apocalyptic signs by which to recognise the end of the age, Jesus moves through a description of the destruction of Jerusalem to his warnings about false christs and false prophets. Then comes this passage:

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt. 24:37-39).

In the comments concerning the Parable of the Ten Virgins, it was noted that one characteristic of the true followers of Jesus is preparedness. In the passage above, this characteristic is again noted, albeit in a negative sense. Those who are not prepared will suffer great personal loss. Jesus uses the truth that existed at the time of Noah regarding humanity and its relative malaise concerning the requirements of God to describe a society similarly oblivious to the judgment of God, only this time at the end of the age.

Jesus uses this Old Testament instance of the judgment of God which stands in stark contrast to the conclusions of the universalist, pluralist, and inclusivist. During the time of Noah, the vast majority of humanity was swept away. Granted, the point that Jesus is trying to make is not that a similar percentage of humanity will also perish at the end times, but rather that, like in Noah’s time, many people could not care less about God and his judgment.

However, does the use of the Great Flood jibe well with the idea of the vast majority of humanity being saved in the last days?

Pinnock sees in Noah's account nothing but positive things, even going so far as to partially root his positive view of non-Christian religions in the "global covenant with Noah" (*Wideness*, 25). He sees three covenants through which humans may relate to God, the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant, and the new covenant through Jesus (105). "Insofar as salvation connotes a relationship with God, there is salvation for people in all three of the covenants" (105). Even the teaching of Jesus concerning the sheep and the goats should be understood "in the spirit of the Noahic covenant" (164). And the working of God through pagan saints is also "rooted in the covenant with the race through Noah" (93).

Incredibly, Pinnock's initial discussion concerning a "hermeneutic of hopefulness" and his comment about God's nature as not indicative of one who would sit by "while large numbers perish" (or who does not want to rescue only a few brands plucked from the fire) are introduced within his positive comments concerning Noah and the flood (18-25). It is almost as if Pinnock's control suppositions are so strong (eg., God wants to save the vast majority of humanity), that he cannot read Scripture without seeing it everywhere, even in a dismal passage such as the Great Flood. Whereas Jesus uses the example of Noah and the flood in negative terms, Pinnock only uses it positively. This should send up alarm flags concerning Pinnock's understanding of the event.

Note also that this judgment comes with the advent of the Son of Man. As Jesus will note at the end of this discourse with four successive parables, a time of separation is coming. Just as in the days of the flood, once that time comes, there will be no turning back. So often conservative pastors and theologians are derided for warning people of the impending judgment to come. However, Jesus warns similarly.

After this discourse, the events of his life move quickly to his crucifixion. When little time remained to say much, Jesus took the time to warn of the judgment that is to come when the Son of Man makes his return. This warning should be heeded, or some will be deemed unprepared as were the people at the time of Noah. Once the rains fell, how many of those people began to clamber toward the ark and seek asylum therein? Such a pathetic picture of apathy and indifference turned to cold realisation will also be seen in the last days.

3.3.5 A Closing Bibliological Observation

There is a tremendous amount of material in the Gospels and specifically from the mouth of Jesus that speaks of the judgment and wrath of God.²⁴⁵ There is simply no getting around this fact. At this point, one's Bibliology becomes very important. If evangelicals believe the Bible to be the Word of God – God speaking to them – then they must pay attention to this large amount of material. Evangelicals cannot at one and the same time say they believe the Bible to be God's Word, and say Jesus did not speak all that much about God's judgment.

Of course, the other position is to regard the Bible as any other book, whether religious or secular, created from the fertile minds of humans. The obvious ancillary to this hypothesis is that it then contains errors, contradictions, and falsehoods. From this one can simply pick and choose what to keep while discarding the rest. If, for example, the portrait of Jesus that depicts him as ultra-tolerant is preferred, then all data contrary to this portrait will be discarded. If belief in the supernatural is lacking, then discard all the miracles of Jesus. In short, some scholars have a tendency to dismiss as “inauthentic” the very sayings and actions of Jesus which contradict their desired portrait of him.

If this is indeed the preferred approach, let it be known that some are discarding what amounts to nearly half of everything Jesus said in the Gospels. This bibliological approach has little regard for the actual Gospels themselves, and is more concerned with what is preferred, than what the material actually says. It is amazing that the Quest for the Historical Jesus has almost always yielded a portrait of Jesus which perfectly jibes with the “Quester's” preconceptions about him. As Meier sarcastically notes, the many reconstructions of Jesus look “suspiciously like a professor in a Religious Studies Department at some American university” (*Marginal*, vol. 2, 837).

One's Bibliology is instrumental to one's accepted portrait of Jesus. In the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders (Matt. 7:24-27), Jesus talks specifically about his teachings. Like the wise builder who builds his house upon the rock, those people who hear the teachings of Jesus and put them into practice can weather the storms of life. But those people who hear these teachings and ignore them will suffer loss when the wind and the waves come crashing upon them.

But what teachings is Jesus referring to? All of them it would seem. He makes no distinction. He does not tell his listeners to just consider his teachings on forgiveness and the love of the Father, but ignore or discard the teachings about his wrath and coming judgment.

²⁴⁵ “By actual count, the Synoptics record Jesus saying well over twice as much about the wrath of God as he ever did about his love” (Baird, 1963:72).

The Wise Builder adheres to *all* the teachings of Jesus, not just some of them. It would be supremely foolish to pick and choose what teachings to follow of Jesus and which ones to ignore.

3.3.6 Conclusion to Christological Evaluation

At the beginning of this section on Christology an investigation was begun to see if the inclusivist portrayal of the teaching of Jesus is biblically founded. Specifically, a hermeneutic of judgment concerning the person and teaching of Jesus was used in order to determine if inclusivism's wider hope, as opposed to the more restricted exclusivism of traditional evangelicalism, has any support from the ministry of Jesus. Some tentative conclusions can now be made in this regard.

Of first note is the sheer volume of teaching from the mouth of Jesus concerning the judgment of God. This fact alone should cause evangelicals to be cautious about inclusivism's tendency to portray Jesus as a messenger of the love of God, with little to no mind for his message of judgment. Any theological system which is willing to ignore what amounts to nearly half of the teaching of Jesus, all the while claiming to be faithful to his teaching, needs to be viewed with a wary eye.

The survey of the teaching of Jesus as regards the parables touched upon all the major parables commonly used by inclusivists in support of their soteriological optimism. A few parables where little to no coverage by inclusivists is offered were also covered.. Two basic emphases in these passages were identified. Firstly, Jesus has a strong emphasis on judgment as separation. Whether it is fish, weeds, trees, or paths, Jesus envisions all people in two, broad categories: the damned and the saved. Secondly, this emphasis on separation finds its heart in what people not only do with the teaching of Jesus, but with his person as well.

Some inclusivists have famously proposed the idea that people can be genuine followers of Jesus without actually knowing him. This is in opposition to the historic evangelical position that an individual must have cognitive awareness of Christ in order to be his disciple. From the above study of the pertinent parables, the exclusivist position appears to have much greater support than either the inclusivism of Rahner (Catholic) or Pinnock (evangelical). An inclusivist optimism either in regards to large numbers of people being saved (the extent of salvation) or a wider hope of salvation for those who do not know Jesus cognitively (the access to salvation) seems unjustified. Errant inclusivist conclusions have been produced mainly by a faulty hermeneutic which is more concerned with theological integrity than

exegetical reliability, but once the latter is abandoned, little hope of attaining the former can be countenanced.

Lastly, it was recognised that if Jesus explicitly condemned certain beliefs or people, evangelicals should be willing to do the same. This was particularly evident with respect to the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees. Many of the same errors the Pharisees made, and for which Jesus vehemently condemned them, seem to be continued in certain Christian circles today. Evangelicals cannot proclaim the salvation of those people which Jesus specifically condemned.

The message of judgment found in the words of Jesus is in actuality a message of grace. When God warns that sin will be dealt with, he is being gracious, for a warning is a blessing, not a curse. Suppose a person were sick and went to the doctor, only to be told that he or she was completely healthy. Is the doctor doing any favours by not telling the truth of the condition? Suppose a father does not tell his child that, if the child touches the hot stove, that child's hand will be burned. Is the parent doing the child a favour by not warning of the possible danger?

When the prophet Jonah was commanded to go to Nineveh and preach against its sin, he fled in the opposite direction to Tarshish. Jonah gives the reason why he did not want to go and preach to that city, and it was because he knew that in his preaching of judgment, there was a possibility of repentance on the part of the Ninevites, and mercy from God. "O, LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (4:2). Jonah had realised that in his warning to the Assyrians, there was the potential for mercy and grace.

"Those who perceive only the love of God avert their eyes from the uncongenial doctrine of the wrath of God. But in eliminating the wrath or disgrace of God they have also eliminated the grace of God. Where there is no fear there can be no rescue. Where there is no condemnation there can be no acquittal."²⁴⁶

The same is the case with the judgment words of Jesus. Jesus does not tell these horrible things because in some sick way he enjoys it, or because he simply wants to scare people, or because he was a fear monger. The reason is much more transparent and gracious than that. Jesus knows that the Father is holy and that he *must*, in being true to his holy nature, deal with sin. He cannot simply overlook it or ignore it. Being a holy God of justice, he must and will

²⁴⁶ F. C. Synge as quoted in Ajith Fernando, *Crucial Questions about Hell* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991) 112.

handle the problem of sin and rebellion in his creation. Jesus is doing nothing more than speaking the truth. Some may not like hearing the truth, but that matters little. For Jesus to be a true messenger of God – to be a prophet with integrity – he must speak the truth. "The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate to the consciences of millions."²⁴⁷

One need only look to the cross to see the God of Jesus doing what Jesus numerous times warned about. At the cross, the wrath of God was poured out on sin. Jesus knew full well what the penalty for sin is and, despite that knowledge, became sin for humanity anyway. Jesus had intimate understanding of what it means to deal with a holy God and, despite that knowledge, became unholy so that sinners might live. When Jesus asked that the cup be taken from him, he was asking that he would not have to partake of God's wrath, "yet not my will but thine be done." "The cup is a metaphorical expression referring to the judgment of God as it is expressed in the pouring out of His wrath upon sinful nations and people."²⁴⁸ Here is yet another example from the life of Jesus of his awareness of the reality of God's wrath.

This fact in the teaching of Jesus cannot be ignored. Whether it be in his interaction with the religious leaders of his day, or in his favourite form of teaching, the parable, or in his general discourses to the masses or his private teaching to his disciples, the judgment of God is at the forefront of Jesus' mind. It may, in fact, not be too far off the mark to say that it was *the* primary topic of his teachings. Jesus was, after all, a messenger of the grace of God, and part of that message of grace involved warning of the impending judgment of God if sinners do not heed the warnings.

Inclusivists such as Pinnock find the judgment statements of Jesus to be relatively unimportant. "What kind of God would send large numbers of men, women, and children to hell without the remotest chance of responding to the truth? This does not sound like the God whom Jesus called Father" (*Wideness*, 154). From Pinnock's numerous writings, one is led to believe that whenever statements of judgment fall from the lips of the Saviour, they should always somehow be excused away. Such emotional appeals as "this does not sound like the God of Jesus" ignore the vast quantity of statements by Jesus that do speak of the Father's wrath, judgment, and condemnation. Inclusivists concentrate on the positive statements by Jesus while ignoring the negative ones.

²⁴⁷ A. W. Tozer, as quoted in Fernando, *Hell*, 128.

²⁴⁸ Jerry Bridges, *Discipleship Journal* (May/June 2002) 20. Examples of the metaphor of the cup as signifying the wrath of God are found in Psa. 75:8, Jer. 25:15, Isa. 51:17,22, and Rev. 14:9-10.

Far too often Jesus is portrayed as a messenger of God's grace, which in turn is defined as God's merciful forgiveness of everything sinners do, regardless of any other factors. This message, however, blurs the line between tolerance and forgiveness. God is most definitely not the former; he most certainly is the latter. If God were only a tolerant God, then no matter what humans do, no matter how sinful they might be, no matter how rebellious they are toward God's will, he will put up with it. The fact that God is a forgiving God – and that that forgiveness is done on his terms and in his way – is a far different thing to say. Sin has not been swept under the carpet, it has been dealt with justly and righteously. Sin has not been tolerated, it has been forgiven.²⁴⁹

Jesus spoke both about the grace and mercy of the Father, as well as his wrath and judgment. The theologians, scholars, pastors, and church leaders who find it too distasteful or off-putting to speak about the wrath of God seemingly find Jesus too distasteful and off-putting as well. A diplomat or ambassador who only speaks the words which he deems attractive of the administration he is representing, while ignoring those things which he deems repellent, will quickly lose his job. It behoves evangelicals to speak all the words of Jesus, not just the ones they like.²⁵⁰ If they do not, they cannot consider themselves to be his ambassadors.

“As God hates all sin and all sinners, as he is not only holy but just, and as the Bible warns us that he ‘will not leave the guilty unpunished’ (Nahum 1:3), how can anyone blithely assume that ‘God is love’ will see them safe? Those who imagine that they can live as they please because God is love, and are banking on God's love to guarantee that they will never go to hell, are making a terrible and tragic mistake” (Blanchard, 1993:172).

3.4 Is Inclusivism's View of God Closer to the Biblical Model than Classical Theism?

A Theological Reflection on Judgment

The landscape of American, evangelical theism has dramatically changed over the past two decades. Many books have chronicled this change, such as *The Evangelical Left*, *Their God Is too Small*, *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, and *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology*, to name a few. As noted in the Introduction, the Soteriology of inclusivism often blossoms into

²⁴⁹ “We have created a God so genially tolerant as to be morally indifferent” (William Temple, quoted in Baird, 1963:13).

²⁵⁰ After noting that one possible reason why some Christians tend to avoid attributing judgment and wrath to God is because they feel it is beneath their image of God to attribute such things to him, Jerry Bridges then notes “the more basic reason we avoid or ignore the idea of God's wrath is that we simply don't think our sinfulness warrants that degree of judgment,” *Discipleship Journal*, 20. In other words, it is a deficient view of sin.

a view of God commonly referred to as Open Theism, which Clark Pinnock has labelled as “radical” in its departure from classical theism.

This section will concentrate on Theology-proper, the view of God. Continuing to use a hermeneutic of judgment, some of the boundaries of inclusivism will be tested to see if anything can be gained by adopting the radical Arminianism of Open Theism. This will particularly impinge upon the two basic tenets of inclusivism and its adoption of Open Theism, the maintenance of the freewill of humans (apparently abandoned in Calvinist schemes), and the wider offer of salvation (as opposed to the typical limited or particular view of Calvinism often adopted by evangelicals).

3.4.1 The Necessity of Change in Theology

Theological systems abound. New models and insights are created almost daily. “There is nothing new under the sun” is not an apt statement of the state of Christian theology today. In fact, unless you develop something new, you are almost entirely ignored. Anyone attempting to write a doctoral dissertation can attest to that! Indeed, probably the worst thing to be labelled in theology today is “unoriginal” or “uncreative.” Theological dinosaurs are treated as extinct by being ignored.

Traditional definitions of terms are discarded. As with Schleiermacher, who redefined “God” to mean “the feeling of absolute dependence,” some evangelical theologians appear to be doing the same sort of thing. In fact, Erickson bemoans this increasing trend of reinterpretation of theological terms in evangelicalism (1997:15). Examples include “salvation,” which is no longer understood to mean “freedom from the consequences of one’s sins” but could simply mean freedom from oppression, be it male, or white, or western oppression. “Sin” is rarely even spoken about, and then almost never in terms of offence against a holy God. “Resurrection” is merely how a person feels about his or her beliefs when they are liberated from their old mindset. The “gospel” is no longer the good news of God incarnating, but rather the good news that points to loving fellow humans and accepting them, no matter how strange their point of view may be. “Heaven” is a peaceful state of mind, and “hell” is mental anguish in this life, but neither have anything to do with a life beyond this earthbound one.

Broadly speaking, there are two camps when it comes to this idea of change. The first is the conservative camp, which maintains that the basic truths of Christianity are no different today than they were two thousand years ago. Major overhauls in Soteriology, Christology, and Theology-proper are not necessary, based mainly on the idea that God in his very nature

does not change, and that the revelation of God in Christ is complete and needs no additions or revisions.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are those theologians commonly referred to as “liberal” (which is equated with “open-mindedness”). These scholars are all too happy to make changes, even major ones, in Christian theology, with the assumption that truth – even God’s truth – needs change over time. To be clear, “reform” is not a bad word in conservative circles, so long as it is understood as moving *back* to original truths which over time have been lost. Normally, reform in evangelical circles means correcting errors which have crept into Christian theology over time, normally errors of the liberal variety.

Clark Pinnock believes that major overhauls in Christian theology are necessary, especially given his claim that evangelicalism and its view of God is more influenced by philosophy than Scripture. It would certainly prove advantageous to Pinnock if indeed he could prove that the theism of traditional evangelicalism is more concerned with pagan teachings than biblical ones, but there is simply too much against him to do so. As many have countered, it seems that Open Theism’s view of God is more influenced by a modern love-affair with tolerance than with an accurate biblical portrayal. Norman Geisler notes, “Ironically, for those who claim classical theism was influenced by the (Greek) philosophy of its day, it turns out that their view arose in a climate dominated by the (process) philosophy of our day” (1997:97).²⁵¹

Geisler asks the key question in the title of his recent book, *Creating God in the Image of Man?* For many evangelicals, this is precisely what is happening with Open Theism. To them, the God of the open theist appears impotent (not only will he not override the freewill of humans, but for some he cannot), ignorant (God cannot know the future choices of free-willed beings), and less than perfect (God is subject to change, both in mind and in nature). Although this study cannot possibly exhaust all of these issues now, it must at least be recognised that they exist and do influence every imaginable aspect of theism.²⁵²

3.4.2 The Attributes of God

In the following sections, the attributes of God will be covered as they directly relate to Open Theism’s inclusivist claims. In some form or fashion all of these attributes will have some

²⁵¹ Pinnock agrees that “we are all influenced by philosophy” (*Most Moved Mover*, 150), and that open theists and conventional evangelical scholars are “both indebted to philosophy, in their case ancient and in my case modern . . . I believe that conventional theists are more influenced by Plato, who was a pagan, than I am by Whitehead, who was a Christian” (143).

²⁵² An excellent example of the response from the traditional evangelical camp concerning the basic tenets of Open Theism can be found in Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000).

relationship to a hermeneutic of judgment. Even though much more could be said about each, the discussion will be limited to the elements of each attribute which relate specifically to this hermeneutic.²⁵³

3.4.2.1 The Two Testaments and God's Immutability

As already noted in the Christology section, the Father Jesus proclaimed is the very God of the Old Testament. The God who commanded the Israelites to kill everyone in Jericho and Ai, men, women, children, infants; the God who wiped out both cities of Sodom and Gomorrah without warning its inhabitants; the God who approved of the slaying of the 450 prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel; the God who sent a plague against his own chosen people, wiping out 24,000 of them because of their sexual immorality; the God who only preserved eight people from all of humanity, drowning the rest of them in a great flood because of their wickedness. With most of these examples, they are used by Jesus and the New Testament authors to warn of the judgment that is yet to come against the ungodly.

Why? Traditionally, evangelicals would say because God's character has not changed. They would ask, what do pluralists and inclusivists have to say about the Great Flood, which certainly wiped out the vast majority of humanity? Why do they ask questions like, "How could a merciful God allow the vast majority of humanity to perish?" when that is precisely what he did in the time of Noah?²⁵⁴

The God who did all these things is the same God Jesus worshipped and obeyed. He is still a holy and righteous God. It is for this reason that Jesus spoke so frequently about his wrath and judgment. Jesus knew the nature of God intimately. Jesus read his Holy Scriptures and believed them to be a true portrayal of the character and nature of the Father. And, because Jesus loves humanity, he spoke the truth about the Father.

The notion that the God of the Old Testament and the "God of Jesus" are somehow not the same Being is nothing more than the dualism of systems such as Gnosticism. Granted, there are several scholars today (Pagels, Koester, etc.) who are attempting to portray

²⁵³ For an interesting study of whether or not the theology of Open Theism is properly considered a strain of Arminianism or a deviation from it, see Steven M. Studebaker, "The Mode of Divine Knowledge in Reformation Arminianism and Open Theism," *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* (September 2004) 469-480. Studebaker sees "theological continuity" between the theism of Reformation Arminianism and that espoused by open theists.

²⁵⁴ It is not too difficult to imagine that if Clark Pinnock or John Hick had been living during the time of Noah, they would have found numerous kind, good, decent people on the earth. This makes good sense, given their definition of "good people," but one is left to conclude either that the people at the time of Noah were decidedly different than people today (a view that does not jibe too well with pluralism's positive view of human nature), or that how God views humanity and how humans view it can be decidedly different. The latter option seems preferable.

Gnosticism as the true Christianity and proper teaching of Jesus that was subverted by politically power-hungry church fathers, but such arguments are based on flimsy reasoning and scant data.²⁵⁵ It is historically and theologically clear that one reason why Gnosticism was opposed in the early centuries of Christendom was because it did not properly portray the teaching of Jesus. One such error of Gnosticism was to make a drastic distinction between the Creator God of the Old Testament and the Spirit God of the New Testament.²⁵⁶ Some evangelical inclusivists seem to be making the very same error when they speak about the “God of Jesus” and strongly imply that his God is not the same “vindictive, petty” God of the Old Testament. The attempt is made to disparage the picture of the Old Testament God and to make the “God of Jesus” the true portrayal of the God of heaven. This attempt, however, fails on several fronts.

In the first place, the “God of Jesus” is also a God of wrath and judgment, not simply the “God of love” that the pluralists and inclusivists want to see. The attempt to depict the “God of Jesus” as only loving and forgiving, at the exclusion of any ultimate or eternal judgment from him is entirely misplaced and does not do justice to the biblical data. The God that Jesus revealed in the Gospels is the very same God that he worshiped as found in the Old Testament. There is not a hint of a difference between the two, and to attempt to prove otherwise only reveals a misunderstanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and more precisely, the attribute of God known as his immutability. To put this another way, if inclusivists want to portray the “God of Jesus” as *only* a God of love and forgiveness, they can only do that by butchering the New Testament text, chopping away the pieces that contradict their pre-conceptions and conclusions.

But is God as portrayed in the Old Testament not much more judgmental and angry than the “God of Jesus?” This common misreading of Scripture needs to be addressed. True, God as depicted in the Old Testament is vengeful, angry and full of wrath, but he is also loving and patient and kind. In fact, the most common phrase used in the Old Testament to describe God

²⁵⁵ See my unpublished Master’s thesis, *The Politics of Heresy*, at the University of Stellenbosch, for a study of this very issue as it relates specifically to the time of Athanasius and the reigns of Constantine and Constantius, AD 325-361, and the battle with the Arian heresy.

²⁵⁶ In brief, Christian Gnosticism made a radical dichotomy, as all dualistic systems do, between two opposing forces or substances, in this case specifically between the flesh and the spirit or soul. The flesh was assumed to be evil and the soul the good part of a human. Salvation involved the liberation of the soul from the prison of the body, and this liberation was enacted through *gnosis*, special knowledge of these truths. The Christian Gnostic could then choose to live his life in one of two opposing ways. He could either live a life of absolute asceticism, where he beat his body into submission, or by absolute licentiousness, where he did with his body whatever he wanted to do with it and in so doing portrayed that the body is nothing. From this radical dichotomy between the material and the immaterial came the Christian Gnostic view of the radical dichotomy between the Old Testament Creator God (who is evil because he created the material world) and his opponent, the “God of Jesus” revealed to be pure Spirit and thus good.

is “slow to anger, abounding in love.”²⁵⁷ Recall that the Old Testament is four times as long as the New Testament. More volume as it relates to the depiction of God in the Old Testament as a God of wrath would be expected than would be found in the New Testament.

The Old Testament covers approximately 2000 years of history (from the time of Abraham; more if one were to consider since the time of creation), while the New Testament only covers less than one hundred years. It seems misplaced to make the simplistic conclusion that God as depicted in the Old Testament is more of *anything* given this disparity between the two testaments.

For example, the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 could easily fit into the Old Testament accounts of God’s judgment. The shocking swiftness of the judgment of this couple recalls similar accounts in the Old Testament. Just because there are more of these incidents in the Old Testament historical record should not lead some to the false conclusion that God’s judgment is now no longer operative or as operative in the New Testament dispensation.

The ultimate act of judgment in the New Testament is the cross. Whereas today there is a tendency to emphasise the cross as God’s supreme act of love, its importance concerning his wrath should not be ignored. As Jesus was made sin for sinful humans (2 Cor. 5:21), he took upon himself the wrath of the Father. This propitiatory act by God’s Son is the reason why his followers need not fear condemnation (Rom. 8:1). If God’s wrath was not poured out on Jesus during the crucifixion, Christians would still have to dread its coming, but as such, they do not (1 Thes. 5:9).

The historical events in the Old Testament must be understood as having spiritual significance, such that the New Testament need not provide a listing of similar historical acts of God’s judgment in order to maintain that his judgment is operative and imminent. For example, the Exodus of Israel from Egyptian captivity is the quintessential act of salvation in the Old Testament, used time and time again by Old Testament authors as a reminder of God’s salvific relationship with his chosen people. The physical Exodus foreshadowed a spiritual exodus that would come through God’s Son, the Messiah. Manna which fell from heaven, for example, was a foreshadow of the true bread of heaven that came in the person of Jesus (John 6).

Paul makes this argument clearer in 1 Cor. 10, where he speaks of spiritual food, spiritual drink, and even a spiritual rock that accompanied the Israelites through the desert during the

²⁵⁷ See Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Psa. 86:15, 103:8, 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2, Nah. 1:3.

time of Moses. In other words, the temporal, physical events seen in the Old Testament are meant to foreshadow the eternal, spiritual aspects in the post-resurrection time as taught in the New Testament. The author of Hebrews makes a similar argument when he speaks of Old Testament elements being a shadow of the spiritual substance that was to come later. For example, he speaks this way concerning the tabernacle (9:11-12), the Sabbath (ch. 4), the sanctuary (8:5), and the Law (10:1). Paul notes elsewhere, “These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col. 2:17).

The same can be said for the issue of judgment. In fact, this is precisely how Paul uses the examples found in 1 Cor. 10. He does not emphasise the salvific aspects of the foreshadowing, Old Testament events as much as he does their quality of judgment. Old Testament judgment is also a foretaste or foreshadow of what is to come. On the temporal plane, in the Old Testament the judgment of God is seen, which is meant to point ultimately to an eternal parallel. In other words, this is how people should expect God to judge sin in the future as well. There is continuity, then, between the Old and New Testaments when it comes to the judgment of God, not a discontinuity.

In the second place, the attempt to make a distinction between the Old Testament portrayal of God and imply that it is somehow inferior to the “God of Jesus” fails by producing an inferior Theology-proper. If the New Testament God is not the same as the Old Testament God in character and nature, then there exists a changing God.²⁵⁸ However, a Trinitarian doctrine must affirm that the Old Testament Jehovah is the exact same character as the “God of Jesus.” Does God change for the better, from the Old Testament to the New Testament? If this is maintained, is this not the error of Gnosticism? Granted, Gnosticism posited two separate and distinct gods, but if some believe that the God as revealed in the Old Testament is of an inferior character to that revealed in the New, are they not treading on similar ground as that of Marcion, for example?

Any being which can change and in fact does change implies one of two directions for that change. Either the being becomes better than it was ante-change, or it becomes worse than it was before. If the being remains exactly the same, then it cannot be said that the being is undergoing change. Of course, positive change is always good, but the being can also change for the worse. Concerning God as depicted in the Bible and commonly portrayed by pluralists and inclusivists, in two thousand years he went from petty and vindictive to

²⁵⁸ Or, of course, two entirely different gods, the heresy of Gnosticism in Christian garb.

forgiving and all-loving. What about the next two thousand years? Who is to say that *now* God has not changed from the loving God depicted by Jesus?

Evangelicals do not endeavour to maintain the immutability of God only for the sake of the concept itself. God's immutability affects other areas of God's nature which are taken for granted. If God changes, so can either his promises or his will and/or ability to keep them. For example, if God does change, then Christians have no assurance that his promises will be fulfilled.

This cuts both ways, both in regard to his positive promises (salvation) as well as the negative (judgment). Negatively speaking, God promises to punish sin. The martyrs who look for the Lord to avenge their blood (Rev. 6:9-11) can have no assurance that this will occur if God does indeed change. Christians look forward to the day when God will ultimately overcome sin, death, and Satan, but these promises cannot be sure if God can change for the worse. Because inclusivism posits a God who can change, all the typical arguments against Process Theology stick to Open Theism as well, despite their objections to the contrary (eg., *Most Moved Mover*, 142-150). This most dramatically affects the ability to trust him, a most disappointing by-product of inclusivism's altered view of God.

Thirdly, there is a bibliological problem. How is it even known that the "God of Jesus" is the correct God? To put this another way, many liberal Christian scholars have disparaged the Bible, reducing it to nothing more than an error-filled, contradiction-infested, human-made book of propaganda. These same scholars also, as if with one voice, deny any notion that Jesus was the "God-man" and the incarnation of the Lord of glory. Instead, any and all depictions of Jesus found in the Bible which give him supernatural qualities or abilities are completely ignored, "demythologised" via the scientific method, so that what is left is simply a man in touch with his inner spirit, a good teacher, or an itinerate rabbi. Jesus is certainly not God incarnate, for such a notion is *a priori* excluded. An historical quest for the *real* Jesus must be performed, not the one dressed up in the Bible with primitive notions of supernatural qualities by primitive people.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ A classic case in point of such liberal approaches and their conclusions is the popular Jesus Seminar, which has concluded that the only statement in the Gospel of Mark, considered to be the oldest of the Gospels, which can be certain was spoken by Jesus is, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's." The methodology of the Jesus Seminar in determining what sayings of Jesus are indeed genuine or not is well known for its creativity. Voters place a red marble in the bucket if the saying was definitely spoken by Jesus, pink if it resembles something Jesus would say, grey signifying close but no, and black definitely no. None of the sayings of Jesus found in the Gospel of John were actually spoken by Jesus so says the Seminar, and 82% of the sayings of Jesus found in all four Gospels were not actually spoken by him. Such conclusions render the Scriptures effectively useless in making any claims about Jesus, his person and his ministry.

Given this picture – a Bible that is filled with errors and a Jesus that is nothing more than a man, albeit a good one – a question must be asked. How sure can Christians be that the “God of Jesus” as found in the New Testament is even the right depiction of God? Jesus certainly could have been wrong. He was after all just another man like any religious person, albeit a very good man. Who is to really say if the “God of Jesus” is the true depiction of the living God, or if the God of the Old Testament is the truer picture?²⁶⁰

Fourthly, the inclusivist position confuses ontological change with progressive revelation. Clearly, more is learned about God in the New Testament than learned in the Old. Abraham did not know as much about God as, say, the Apostle Paul post-Jesus. Clearly believers know more about the love of God with the advent of the incarnation of the Son, but this should not falsely be made to imply ontological change in the very being of God. God has progressively revealed himself through human history, ultimately culminating in Jesus Christ. Knowledge of God has increased over the centuries. What God has revealed has increased or deepened, but this need not imply that God himself has changed. Just because Christians know and understand more about God’s attribute of love does not mean that he was less loving or unloving in the past.

In conclusion, in order for the Soteriology of Open Theism (inclusivism) to be maintained, open theists must manipulate the classical view of God concerning his immutability. However, despite the seeming benefits of a wider hope of salvation, the trade-off is a net loss. God may now appear to be friendlier and more appealing, but he is less trustworthy. Attempts at creating a gap between the Old Testament portrayal of God and that found in the New also yields a faulty Trinitarianism and does not do justice to God as revealed in the person and character of Jesus.

3.4.2.2 A Self-Limiting God?

The radical Arminianism of many inclusivists has caused them to take the axe to another root of classical theism, the omniscience of God. Space will be taken only to note its relationship to human freedom and the judgment of God. More will be said about these matters in a later section.

In order to create relatively autonomous humans, God must limit his own power. Often this is expressed by reference to the omnipotence of God (“God voluntarily limits his power,”

²⁶⁰ Pinnock’s comments about Jesus and his mistaken prophecies appear to also minimise the inclusivist view of the Saviour, making him somewhat less than the portrayal accepted by traditional evangelicalism, and certainly less than the portrait of Jesus found in the New Testament.

Pinnock, *Grace/Will*, 21). Because God is all-powerful, he is able to actually limit his power and knowledge, in order to allow humans real freedom. It is normally argued that if God does know everything that will happen in the future, then those future events are already determined. Thus, humans do not have real, determinative freedom in their choices.

This has further flowed into a portrait of God whereby he may possibly be mistaken in some of his future predictions, despite the fact that he is “omni-competent.” As regards the supreme event of God’s judgment, the cross, Sanders paraphrases God’s concern, “Will this gambit work?” (*Risks*, 119). He can put these words into the mouth of God because Sanders has earlier maintained that God can make mistakes. Not even the event of Christ’s crucifixion can be absolutely guaranteed by God beforehand, because it would involve God possessing prescience concerning the future choices of free-willed creatures, or it must resort to God coercing humans to do it, something he would not do. One is left to wonder what would have happened had God’s “gambit” been unsuccessful, and without sounding too cynical, perhaps “omni-lucky” should also be a term applied to God.

There are few options when it comes to the nature of God. Either he is limited or he is not. To say that because he is omnipotent he can hence limit his omniscience, yields a limited God, no matter how one slices it. In any event, placing limits on the nature of God just creates new problems. Should believers really put their faith and hope and trust in a God who does not know the future entirely? Is it wise to put their future and their life in the hands of a being who is not almighty?

Is it even philosophically possible for an omnipotent Being to make himself less than omnipotent? Much like the understanding that the definition of omnipotence does not entail the ability to do absolutely anything no matter how illogical (like making a square circle), can an omnipotent being become less-than-omnipotent? If the process is reversible, can a semi-omnipotent being make himself omnipotent? If the answer is yes, then it must already be omnipotent or it could not grant itself omnipotence. If the answer is no, then there is no guarantee that God will ever again be omnipotent.

Or is God just pretending to limit himself? If this is truly the case, then he is a deceiver, appearing to be what he in reality is not. There seems little good to be gained by creating an image of God that is less than omniscient and omnipotent. Many of the same problems which arose from denying immutability to the nature of God also crop up when he is denied omniscience and omnipotence as well.

3.4.2.3 Is Love *the* Quintessential Attribute of God?

Inclusivists cannot be faulted for wanting to find a wider hope in the salvation of humanity. Nor can they be chastised for their strong emphasis on the love of God. If not for that love, humanity would have no hope of salvation. And yet, at what point does hopefulness become unrealistic optimism? Perhaps evangelicals do need to emphasise the love of God more than they traditionally have done, but should they become so pie-in-the-sky that they lose sight of other attributes of God, such as his justice and wrath?²⁶¹ For example, Pinnock and Sanders downplay the attribute of wrath. Obviously, this position must be maintained by inclusivists if their optimism concerning a wider hope is preserved, but how valid is it?

In Wayne Grudem's helpful discussion concerning the nature and attributes of God, he covers the matter of God's simplicity or unity (1994:177-180). Traditionally, the doctrine of God's simplicity has maintained that God is not made into parts or pieces, such that part of him is loving, or part holy, and so on. Such an understanding of God's nature would yield the potential conclusion that some parts are bigger than others, or more important to God's character. Grudem notes:

“When Scripture speaks about God's attributes it never singles out one attribute of God as more important than all the rest. There is an assumption that every attribute is completely true of God and is true of all of God's character. For example, John can say that God is light (1 John 1:5) and then a little later say also that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). There is no suggestion that part of God is light and part of God is love, or that God is partly light and partly love. Nor should we think that God is more light than love or more love than light. Rather it is *God himself* who is light, and it is *God himself* who is also love” (178, emphasis original).

All of God's nature is involved in every action he performs. To single out one attribute and make it more important or vital than the others reveals a faulty theism. Inclusivists tend to pit God against himself. They play one attribute of God against another. In an attempt to give the attribute of love primacy, other attributes seem to be washed away.²⁶² When Sanders

²⁶¹ Part of the problem with Pinnock and other inclusivists, as viewed by exclusivists, is that they pick and choose which attributes of God to emphasise, while ignoring the rest. For example, in *Flame of Love*, Pinnock covers three of the four “God is...” statements in the New Testament: “God is love,” “God is spirit,” and “God is life.” However, he entirely ignores “God is a consuming fire,” and it is this type of selectivity that makes exclusivists uncomfortable (see Timothy George, “A Transcendence-Starved Deity,” *Christianity Today* (January 9, 1995) 35).

²⁶² Pinnock also intimates time and time again that the Calvinist understanding of election cannot correspond to the loving picture of God given by Jesus. However, in the plethora of material Pinnock has produced, there is virtually no exegetical support for such a belief. Rather, Pinnock's understanding of God's love and the doctrine

says that wrath should not be considered an integral part of the nature of God as love is, this is clearly the type of manoeuvre inclusivists make to bolster their position. But as Baird notes, God's wrath is "an indivisible part of his love" (1963:72); the two should not be played against each other.

Former professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Stellenbosch, PF Theron, makes a similar point. In his paper, *The 'God of War' and his 'Prince of Peace'*,²⁶³ Theron speaks of "Marcion's modern admirers." Looking at the apparent contradiction between the God of the Old Testament, seemingly involved in constant warfare, and his Son, the Prince of Peace, Theron recognises that false dichotomies between the portrayal of God in the two testaments has at its foundation a faulty view of God's unity.

"The simplicity of God implies that He is of one piece, i.e., that He is undivided, that there is no clash, no conflict, no duplicity in his being, that He is no composite of light and darkness (1 John 1:5), love and hate, compassion and malice and consequently a God of integrity (*integritas* = wholeness) and therefore absolutely trustworthy."²⁶⁴

He also notes that a faulty Bibliology often plays a part in this false dichotomy.²⁶⁵

Evangelicals are obviously committed to the understanding that God is a loving God, best expressed in the sacrifice of his one and only Son. There clearly is tension between the agape God of the cross and the God who commanded Israel to slaughter the Canaanites. Evangelical inclusivists are making an honest attempt at reconciling these apparently disparate pictures of God.

The difficulty often rests, however, in the preconceived notions of what constitutes "love." Exclusivists complain that inclusivists (and certainly pluralists and universalists as well) use a *cultural* definition of love and then project it onto God, instead of allowing the biblical definition to reign supreme. God's love is then defined in wholly modern categories. "Wherever in the Old Testament one finds a reference to the love of God, his wrath is always in the background, either explicitly or implicitly, and we neglect this element to the impoverishment of the Hebrew concept of love" (Baird, 1963:46). In essence, what Baird

of election is determined by theological assumptions, ones which obviously presume an inclusivist understanding of salvation, not hermeneutical ones.

²⁶³ Paper read at the 5th Conference of the International Reformed Theological Institute, Indonesia 2003, on *Faith and Violence*.

²⁶⁴ Theron then quotes the first article of the Belgic Confession: "We all believe with the heart and confess with the mouth that there is one simple and spiritual Being, which we call God."

²⁶⁵ Theron: "When one starts rejecting parts of the Bible it becomes exceedingly difficult to stop short of rejecting it all. *Sola Scriptura* implies *tota Scriptura*. You cannot reject the Old Testament and retain Paul the apostle; you cannot snub the "intolerant" Paul and hold on to Jesus the Jew."

implies is that some scholars are missing the actual biblical, Hebrew understanding of God's love. Interestingly, the radical Arminianism of many inclusivists appears more in line with modern democratic ideals of "one person, one vote" than it does of the biblical picture of God as the potter and his creatures as the clay, to be moulded in the way he sees fit.

Consider this question. What would be more loving: God offering salvation to every individual, with the result that none accept it, or God coercing, as it were, rebellious sinners for their own good, who later come to actually appreciate this coercion by God because they know that without it, they never would have been saved? Inclusivists see God's love supremely expressed in his *offer* of salvation to as wide a breadth of humanity as possible, while exclusivists tend to see God's love expressed in actually obtaining that salvation, even if the offer is not as wide as inclusivists envision it. Jesus said that he came to seek and to *save* the lost, not simply to seek and to offer salvation to them (Lk. 19:10). In inclusivism's sincere desire to see more people saved, they must sacrifice too much of the God of the Bible and replace him with the God of modern culture.

"The tendency to describe Jesus wholly in terms of love is intimately connected with the disposition to identify God with love. Fatherhood is regarded as almost the sole attribute of God, so that when God is loved it is the principle of fatherhood that is loved."²⁶⁶

An imbalanced view of the nature of God will necessarily lead to an imbalanced view of how he acts in the world, particularly in terms of his redemptive and retributive acts.²⁶⁷ Baird again notes, "Any doctrine that does not have a significant place for the wrath of God, that, in effect, does not recognize that justice is a more inclusive and more accurate description of God than love without wrath, is not true to the prophetic and Synoptic picture" (1963:230). Such an assessment seems fair.

3.4.2.4 A Culture of Fairness and Tolerance

It is important to recognise the role culture plays in determinations concerning God and his nature. The typical, evangelical depiction of God's wrath does not sit well with modern and postmodern humans. For starters, it does not appear to be fair but rather arbitrary, this portrait

²⁶⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1951) 16-17. He then cites von Harnack and Reinhold Niebuhr as theologians who in his estimation have made this mistake.

²⁶⁷ In fact, there is a growing dislike in Christian theology to even consider the judgment of God in retributive terms. This has been popularised in large part by the work by Travis already alluded to, *Christ and the Judgment of God*. Retribution is considered beneath God, mainly because it is becoming increasingly beneath human systems of punishment as well. For a recent albeit brief treatment of this issue, see Garry J. Williams, "Penal Substitution: A Response to Recent Criticisms," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March 2007) 71-86.

of God acting the way he sees fit, seemingly oblivious to the demands for autonomy by humankind.²⁶⁸

In the first place, one must define “fairness” before one can expect more of it from one party than from another. This is precisely where the problem lies. The definition of “fairness” depends upon one’s source. The biblical God can hardly be considered fair in the modern sense of the word.

For example, consider the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16). The vineyard owner hires groups of workers throughout the day, some working far less hours than others, yet he decides to pay all of them the same wage. The first group of workers who have worked the entire day are outraged. ‘This is unfair! It is not right that the men who have only worked one hour get the same amount of pay as those who bore the full heat of the sun.’

The owner’s answer is telling. In essence, he notes that the money is his money, and if he decides to be generous to the late-arriving workers and pay them a full day’s wage, that is his right. After all, he is not being unfair but has paid the early-arriving workers exactly what they agreed to work for. “Don’t I have a right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?” (vs. 15).

Now place this story in the modern world, where so much is said about personal rights, unions, equality, and justice in fair wages. One can only imagine that the first group of workers, if they were from today, would have hired a lawyer and sued the owner of the vineyard. Who cares if they received exactly what they agreed to work for? It is not fair that others received the same amount.

This is a parable about the character of the God of Jesus. Certainly, it states that he is generous and merciful. But it also notes that he will do what he wants to do, regardless of how often humans might cry “Unfair!” From the point of view of the early-arriving workers, the owner is acting unfairly, and from a modern mindset, many would give the same verdict. However, Jesus does not allow such a verdict to stand. The begrudged workers have no right to claim the owner is unfair. The first workers received exactly what they agreed to work for and as such, were treated fairly and justly. The last workers got more than they deserved and as such were treated generously or mercifully. What is in the parable, then, is not fairness and unfairness, but rather fairness (or justice) and mercy. There is no unfairness present.

This issue of fairness is a crucial one. Christian theologians can define the term using secular and humanistic categories and then project them onto God, or they can let God and his

²⁶⁸ Theron: “The language Jesus occasionally uses against the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (Matt 23 for instance) disqualifies Him as the epitome of tolerance in the modern sense of the word” (see footnote 125).

Son speak for themselves. The universalist and pluralist clearly do the former; the inclusivist is not quite so guilty although still has a great tendency to speak only about God's love. Only the exclusivist provides a picture of the character of God that goes completely against the culturally acceptable depictions.

Clark Pinnock notes that the opinion by evangelical theologian Carl Henry that God is perfectly within his rights to save whom he chooses to save is "shocking" (*Four Views*, 101). That is correct, it is shocking. That the vineyard owner actually can do what he wants to do with his own vineyard is offensive to a sensitive, rights-oriented mindset. Some prefer to be able to tell the vineyard owner what he can and cannot do with his vineyard. In this age of political empowerment and personal rights, such ideas that God can do what God wants to do without consulting his creatures are anathema. He must bend to their will, not vice-versa.

This carries over to the offer of salvation. For God to truly be "loving" in the inclusivist's sense of the word, he *must* offer salvation to each and every individual. However, this seems to water-down the biblical concept of grace. Exclusivists counter that if salvation is indeed a free gift of God's grace, then even the offer is a gracious offer. In other words, if sinners do not even deserve salvation, then talk of them deserving the offer of salvation detracts from an understanding of grace. Something given which is actually deserved by the receiver is no longer grace, but merit. For all their talk about being evangelicals, inclusivists appear more like Catholics from the vantage point of exclusivists.

An inclusivist like Pinnock speaks in glowing terms about the loving God of Jesus, but how special is Pinnock's portrayal of God really? For the inclusivist, the contradictory claims of the world's religions about the nature and character of God are washed away in a sea of love and forgiveness. The God of Pinnock is more indifferent than he is loving, more aloof than he is caring. He does not really concern himself with the truth. Those contradictory attributes credited to him by worshipers in the world's religions are of no concern to him.

He is a creation of modern culture, a God of complete tolerance. The God of inclusivism looks strangely postmodern, not biblical.

3.4.2.5 Human Freedom and the Wrath of God

There is a fine line which Pinnock attempts to walk but which may not be possible to do. Pinnock's inclusivism dangerously approaches universalism. This is seen in his discussion about the wrath of God, a welcome matter to be seen in a Pinnock publication, since it is rarely covered by him. Interestingly, it comes in a book almost entirely devoted to God's loving grace through his Spirit, *Flame of Love*.

In the third chapter of this provocative book, Pinnock lays down his arguments for why evangelicals need a stronger Spirit Christology as opposed to the Logos Christology which has dominated Christian theology for many centuries. While at times sounding dangerously close to Adoptionism,²⁶⁹ Pinnock rightly wants evangelicals to recognise the important role the Holy Spirit has played in the “theodrama” that involves God’s creation and re-creation in human history. He proposes to view “Christ as an aspect of the Spirit’s mission, instead of (as is more usual) viewing Spirit as a function of Christ’s” (80). This noble endeavour goes through some heady topics which include Irenaeus’ Theory of Recapitulation, the Orthodox emphasis on incarnation and resurrection as triumphs over death as opposed to the more Western emphasis on guilt and sin, and Anselm’s Satisfaction Theory of the atonement, which Pinnock believes has some major flaws.²⁷⁰ All said, Pinnock covers some good ground in a relatively short chapter and he does so admirably.

It is from his discussions concerning the Satisfaction Theory that material which is of interest to the present study can be found. Among the problems of this theory of the atonement Pinnock lists 1) it logically leads to a limited view of the atonement, 2) it appears to make the Father and the Son opposed to each other,²⁷¹ and 3) it gives the impression that the Father actually hates sinners (106-108). From these points Pinnock goes to a brief discussion about the wrath of the Father, which in Anselm’s theory must be appeased by the

²⁶⁹ Pinnock borrows some concepts from the heresy of Adoptionism while clearly stating that he does not intend to espouse its overall non-incarnational view of Christ (91).

²⁷⁰ Despite the flaws, though, Pinnock does affirm some truth in the satisfaction theory. “Family room cannot altogether displace courtroom in our theological analogies” (111).

²⁷¹ Pinnock believes that the traditional evangelical position pits God the Father against Jesus his Son. Ignoring for the moment whether or not this is true, does Pinnock’s solution really alleviate this difficulty? If there is such a thing as eternal punishment (which evangelical inclusivists certainly believe, even if they have modified the historical view of hell with ideas of post-mortem evangelism and annihilationism), from where does this punishment come if not from God? It seems that the only way to eliminate any inkling of “God against himself” is to remove eternal punishment entirely and adopt universalism. Even the attempts by inclusivists to make hell a place of its inhabitants’ own choosing do not solve this problem, since very clearly it is not human beings who have fashioned hell and its surroundings, but God. Further, hell would have been made *before* any human beings made a decision to rebel against God, if the creation account of Genesis is taken seriously. In an attempt to make the love of God supreme over all other attributes, inclusivists have unwittingly caused a division in the character of God that they thought they were eliminating.

Son.²⁷² Despite some potential errors in his use of Scripture, Pinnock provides a good albeit brief focus on God's wrath and what it means in the context of the atoning work of Jesus.²⁷³

Pinnock rightly recognises that the satisfaction theory of the atonement logically leads to a limited atonement position.²⁷⁴ This is seen by reason of the fact that God does not "assault the same person twice" for sin (106). Pinnock seems to be saying that it appears unjust that God would have Jesus pay for the sins of everybody, and then still have individuals suffer the penalty for their own sins anyway. In fact, this is an argument commonly used in support of a limited atonement. If Jesus truly did die for the sins of each and every individual human being, then it should logically lead to universalism rather than a salvation which is in some way limited.

Combining the ideas of Christ's representation of humanity with Irenaeus' recapitulation theory, as contrasted with Anselm's theory, Pinnock comes dangerously close to universalism and one wonders why he does not make the final leap to it. Consider his view of the wrath of God at the cross. Typically, evangelicals have envisioned this wrath as being taken by the Son, turned away from sinful humanity and placed squarely on the incarnate Lord instead. This they call propitiation. But in Pinnock's attempt to be more Trinitarian (93) and relational (see ch. 2) in his view of this event, and in the desire to not make it appear that the Father and Son had a breach in their relationship during the crucifixion, Pinnock looks to downplay this

²⁷² Interestingly, Pinnock believes that Anselm's theory of the atonement was more influenced by his own social environment of medieval feudalism than from the Bible, a claim not unique to Pinnock (107). Ironically, many of Pinnock's detractors claim that Pinnock is at times equally influenced by the anti-judgment environment of his own society than by Scripture, an opinion shared by the present author. Commenting specifically on Pinnock's Open Theism, Brent Kelly makes this concluding remark in his intriguing paper presented at the 2001 annual conference of the Evangelical Theological Society: "Trading God's providence for a false belief in limited power demonstrates a desire for the Americanization of Christianity, and not a commitment to orthodoxy" ("Open Theism and Democratic Methodology").

²⁷³ Pinnock is a top-notch theologian but his exegesis often fails him. For example, in his present work under consideration, Pinnock uses 1 Thes. 5:9 as a verse to support his claim that "humanity is not destined for wrath but for salvation" (109). However, is Paul talking generally about humanity in this passage, or more specifically about those who have faith in Jesus? Putting aside for the moment that the entire epistle is written to the "church of the Thessalonians" (1:1), the immediate context of chapter 5 is speaking to those who are "sons of light" (vs. 5) and "belong to the day," who have the "breastplate of faith and love," and for a "helmet" the "hope of salvation" (vs. 8), hardly general references to humanity. The "we" of verse 9, then, is referring specifically to believers, not to humans in general. Unfortunately, this sort of hermeneutic by Pinnock often characterises his use of Scripture, and it necessarily skews his viewpoint and final conclusions. Ironically, Pinnock chides others for supposedly making the same mistake, namely, "pluck[ing] texts out of context" (*Most Moved Mover*, 20).

²⁷⁴ Interestingly, a debate is currently brewing in British evangelicalism over the atonement of Christ and whether or not the "penal substitution" model should be abandoned (see the website for Evangelicals Now, www.e-n.org.uk). Steve Chalke is leading those who want to see the model discarded.

propitiatory notion.²⁷⁵ For Pinnock's view, "participation" is a much better descriptor (102-103).

In a typically Orthodox take, Pinnock envisions humanity as already redeemed in the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ as our representative.

"God reconciled the world in Christ – God included everybody in it, without even asking. The effectiveness of this reconciliation is not so much opting in as *not opting out*" (109, emphasis added).

In other words, implied here is the fact that so long as an individual does not choose to reject this offer by God, it is already affected for that person.²⁷⁶

In fact, Pinnock appears to go even further than this. Not only is it affected *for* the individual, it is affected *in* that person. This is where Pinnock's flirtation with universalism becomes obvious. It is not that Jesus turns away wrath from the humans he is representing. Rather, by taking on their humanity, they actually have already experienced that wrath.

"The judgment did not fall on the beloved Son but on our representative and *therefore on us*. Christ delivered sinful humanity up to a well-deserved destruction" (110, emphasis added).

It can rightly be asked, then, if humanity has already experienced this well-deserved destruction, why is there any future destruction to be expected?

Pinnock has an affinity for the theory of Annihilationism.²⁷⁷ Not worrying now about the pros and cons of that particular view, it need only be considered for the moment why Pinnock does not adopt universalism instead. If indeed the wrath of God and the judgment for sins has already been dealt with at the cross, and even further, if this is not a propitiation by the Son as much as it is a participation by humanity in this destruction, why do is there not a universal salvation? If the atonement is universal in its scope, should there not logically be a salvation that is universal as well? If the cross is truly the consummation of God's wrath on the sin of humanity, and not simply its propitiation, why not a universal salvation?²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ It has already been recognised by others that "Pinnock rejects the propitiatory view of Christ's atoning work" (*Four Views*, 26). Addressing "My God, my God..." (Mk. 15:34), Pinnock can conclude that "Christ did not appease divine anger" (109), a most curious conclusion.

²⁷⁶ However, see Jn. 3:36 contra this view. Pinnock's position can have radical consequences, especially when one considers those who have never heard the gospel, a matter at the heart of this dissertation. If "opting out" is truly the only way to lose this salvation, it stands to reason that those who have never heard and hence never can opt out are indeed saved. Such a belief, if adopted by the wider Christian community, could potentially have drastic consequences for the missions endeavour.

²⁷⁷ See Roger E. Olson, 2002:329. See also William Crockett, *Four Views on Hell*, 1992) and Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* 115.

²⁷⁸ What is clearly excluded in Pinnock's understanding of the wrath of God and what occurred at the cross is an eternal, conscious place of torment. To his credit, Pinnock at least jettisons the notion that there can be an

As noted previously, a universal salvation would violate the freedom of humans to reject God's offer. This is the non-negotiable in Pinnock's soteriological equation. But is this truly the case? Does Pinnock really need to hold in tension a universal atonement with a salvation that is less than universal, only for the sake of preserving human freedom?²⁷⁹ And even more pointedly, does he ultimately preserve human freedom in any event?

Incredibly, as representational a model as Pinnock proposes, it fails in exactly the same way. A universal salvation would not have to negate human freedom any more than a universal atonement would. Pinnock makes good use of Paul's analogy of the first and second Adams, but Pinnock seems to concentrate too much on the second Adam to the exclusion of the first. If Christ's representation and recapitulation is truly a participatory atoning work, as Pinnock proposes, then clearly the representation of the first Adam was also participatory. If not, then Paul's (and Pinnock's) comparisons between the two Adams would fail. Therefore, all of humanity rises with Christ and equally falls with Adam. That being said, God is already faced with a world in which to bring about salvation, he must violate human freedom. All of humanity had already chosen in the first representative to rebel against God.

Ironically, if Pinnock's participatory model of the atonement is accepted, it must be concluded that it actually *violates* human freedom. Humanity already made the choice in Adam. Christ in essence "forces" humanity into another role, one against which it had already strongly objected in the Garden. This is actually implied in Pinnock's comment quoted earlier: "God reconciled the world in Christ – God included everybody in it, *without even asking*" (109, emphasis added). Pinnock has unwittingly given up the non-negotiable of freewill in this statement.

In fact, as will be argued in the next section, God *must* violate human freedom if he is able to save a willingly rebellious human race. Pinnock's Christology, then, is wanting due to its failure to maintain a solid Anthropology and more specifically, Hamartiology. There is some good data to be mined from his representational, participatory model of the atonement,

eternal hell. To have such a place would negate any idea of a universal atonement, as Pinnock rightly recognises. To put it simply, if Jesus has already paid the penalty for the sins of humanity, it makes little sense that some humans would still have to spend time in hell paying the penalty for their sins. A limited atonement makes much better sense of an eternal hell.

²⁷⁹ It should be noted that this tension is not limited to an inclusivist of Pinnock's ilk. Many evangelicals can have a similar tension in their theology. However, it seems that a Calvinist would have less of a problem than an Arminian in this regard. It is much easier to logically maintain a *universal fall--limited atonement--less than universal salvation* scheme than a *universal fall--universal atonement--less than universal salvation* one, especially given Pinnock's participatory atonement model. It is made all the easier for the Calvinist who sees the will of humans as subject to the will of God, as opposed to an Arminian system where soteriologically the opposite is usually the case.

but unfortunately he does not consistently apply it across the systematic categories. Pinnock's inclusivism comes dangerously close to universalism and, in fact, should logically yield it if not for Pinnock's misapplication of his own method.

How does this fit into an overall study of the judgment of God? By misconstruing how the wrath of God and the cross of Christ interact, Pinnock produces a Soteriology that is suspect. Granted, there is still much to it that is appealing, but one is left wondering how much and at what cost. Pinnock's emphasis on human freedom and the love of God is certainly part of its appeal, but are his arguments even in these areas solid ones? It is to these topics that attention is now given.

3.4.2.6 Human Freedom and the Love of God

As just seen, Pinnock's understanding of the wrath of God pushes him to a position that seems untenable. In an attempt to preserve human soteriological freedom, Pinnock has constructed a model of the atonement which supposedly does just that. However, he does not take his own model to its logical conclusion and thus a needless tension is created. As noted, he still does not preserve human freedom in the way he intended to preserve it.

Put another way, all of humanity stood with Adam as its representative in the Fall, and similarly, all of humanity stood with Jesus as its representative in the atonement. Given these facts, it makes little sense to reject a universal salvation for no other reason than the want to preserve human freedom. Pinnock's model produces a scenario in which God himself must become a human – and this solely by his own design and desire – and “undo” what humans had already willingly done, namely, rebel against God. This can hardly be said to be a model which preserves human freedom.

However, Pinnock should be given the benefit of the doubt. Suppose that his model does preserve human freedom as he hopes it does. Is Pinnock's desire to preserve human soteriological freedom a noble endeavour? Put another way, is Pinnock correct to contend that a superior soteriological system preserves human soteriological freedom, as opposed to one (typically Calvinism in Pinnock's mind) which violates it?

Inclusivists contend that true love cannot be coerced. Arminianism makes the election of God conditional, i.e., on the basis of God's foreknowledge of those who will choose to follow him. Calvinism, on the other hand, makes the election unconditional, i.e., not on the basis of anything the creature will do or does, but solely according to the plan and good purpose of God. This appears to be coercive and hence unloving, according to inclusivists and open

theists. Related to this, two commonly held beliefs by open theists and by many Arminians in general will be considered.

God respects human freedom²⁸⁰ and will not violate it.

If the above presupposition is true, it would make sense of various portions of Scripture which might be difficult for Calvinists to handle. For example, Scripture says that God wants all people to come to repentance and be saved (1 Tim. 2:4, 2 Pet. 3:9). Those who hold to a Calvinist view of election will obviously have some difficulty, at least initially, with these passages.²⁸¹ The difficulty is simple to recognise: if God wants all people to be saved, but God only elects some people to be saved, is this not a fundamental theological contradiction? If God wants to save all people but unconditionally elects to only save some of them, perhaps either he does not want all to be saved, or he does not unconditionally elect some to be saved.

Open theists vehemently state the latter. They posit that God does want all people to be saved, but there is actually something he wants even more. He wants them to exercise their freedom of choice. If he simply forced people against their will to trust in him, this would be a type of choice that would not reflect genuine, voluntary love. Therefore, God is willing to lose the creature because he prefers to grant freedom of choice, even if it means that God does not get entirely what he wants, namely, the salvation of all people.

Is this basic presupposition sound? Does God truly respect human freedom so much that he will not violate it? It seems like a tenuous presupposition simply because Scripture points to instances when God does violate human freedom.

To this point in this study, the judgment which came at the time of Noah upon the entire human race in a worldwide deluge has served well, and it serves well again here. Jesus says that during the time of Noah people were marrying and giving in marriage up until the day the doors of the ark were closed (Matt. 24:37-38). In other words, they were enjoying life, happy with it, “eating and drinking” and doing all those things which humans do in the course of existence. Supposedly living it to the fullest, they were entirely oblivious to the impending judgment, and Jesus uses this example to speak of the future coming of the Son of Man (vs. 39-41).

²⁸⁰ Even the matter of “freedom” is not an easy one to clarify. Open theists tend toward a view of libertarian freedom whereby an individual is able to choose between A or B without constraints (see Hasker, *Openness*, 136-137), but is this really an adequate view of freedom? If both A and B must be open for choosing, such that if they were not then the individual was not truly free, how does this definition of freedom apply to God? If A is “must tell the truth” and B is “must not tell the truth,” clearly God is not free to choose between the two. By his very nature God is constrained to choose A and hence, by this definition of freewill, is not actually free, which is hardly a satisfactory option.

²⁸¹ For a good Reformed answer to this dilemma, see Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 683-684.

What is made of this when it comes to the freewill of humans? It seems that the very existence of judgment would negate any idea that God does not violate their freedom of will. Those who lived at the time of Noah were seemingly happy with their lives. They wanted nothing to do with God, and in an instant, God wiped them all out. What can more clearly be a negation of human freedom than when there are people who want to continue to live but God terminates their lives?²⁸²

As previously noted, inclusivists have an affinity for the understanding of hell that C. S. Lewis taught, one which seemingly kept in tension the freewill of humans and the judgment of God. Unfortunately, Lewis' comment has little biblical support, most notably from Jesus himself. Jesus never depicts hell as a sit-in of happy yet rebellious people, anymore than he depicts the Great Flood as a welcome event. The horrors of hell are foremost in the teaching of Jesus, but some open theists seem to believe that hell is not all that bad.²⁸³

The only way to make the judgment of God *not* violate the freedom of humans is to make that judgment a welcome event. This is why Lewis and others have a difficult time with a conscious place of eternal torment where the inhabitants are uncomfortable and unhappy. If they are unhappy and uncomfortable, it would seem that they are forced to make hell their abode, and if they are forced, then their freedom of will is being violated, something open theists say God does not do. However, if the view of hell is transformed into a place where its denizens would feel at home, where they actually want to reside, where the doors are locked from the inside and where they can be lords of their own lives, then the basic presupposition that God does not violate the will of free creatures has been maintained.²⁸⁴

It seems that the common view of the open theists is less than airtight. God does violate the freewill of humans whenever it is necessary for him to do so. Arminians have always had a problem with the sovereignty of God, and here the Calvinists seem to be more solid. A typical complaint a Calvinist would have with Arminians is that they seem to make God's will subject to the will of his creatures. If God's election is conditional upon the choice of humans, then it seems that the individual's will supersedes the will of God. Calvinists, on the other hand, bend over backwards to ensure that God's will is always supreme, and in the face

²⁸² It appears that Pinnock recognises this weakness in his own formulation of inclusivism when he says the following: "Though God does not normally overpower people, I do not deny that it sometimes seems that he does" (*Flame*, 161). Yet despite this brief admission, Pinnock continues in his arguments with the understanding that God does not violate human freedom, and his very next argument is to point to the existence of hell as proof.

²⁸³ To be fair, Pinnock adopts Annihilationism, but his favourable evaluation of Lewis' view depicting hell as a welcome place seems to minimise the horrors of it as depicted in Scripture.

²⁸⁴ Gregory Boyd claims that hell is a place where a rebellious sinner becomes "lord of nothingness" (*Warfare Theodicy*, 354-356).

of God's judgment, that seems to be a wise tactic.²⁸⁵ The prophet Isaiah states that God's purposes cannot be thwarted (14:27), and Job concurs (42:2).²⁸⁶ When Paul says that God "works out all things in conformity with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11) this surely includes judgment, which clearly can and does violate the freedom of humans.

There can be no clearer way to violate someone's freedom of will than to take their life when they fully intend to and want to keep on living. Yet God has done this in the past – as the flood teaches, along with other biblical examples such as the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, or the judgment of Ananias and Sapphira – and he will do it in the future, if the biblical teaching involving the future coming judgment is taken seriously.

True love cannot be forced or coerced.

The second prong of the Open Theism fork is the belief that true love cannot be forced or coerced. A full-blown, psychological study of what constitutes true love is not necessary. Only a brief investigation of the basic idea that true love cannot come about by an act of force or violation of one's will need be considered. Perhaps an analogy will help.

We have all seen a television programme or movie where someone is precariously perched upon a window sill scores of stories above the pavement, fully intending to destroy their life by hurling themselves downward. Sometimes the police officer is able to "talk down" the person, but in some instances, a more drastic action is taken whereby the person is grabbed and forcibly removed from the dangerous predicament. The question to ask here is, "Are any of those people who were saved against their will happy later that it was done?" It is reasonable to suggest that there are some who are happy they were saved, despite the fact that at the time of their salvation they were forced against their will.

There is little difference between this hypothetical situation and the one in which sinners find themselves. Paul states that those who are controlled by the sinful mind are unwilling and unable to submit to God (Rom. 8:7-8). There is both an inability and a wilful rebellion against God and his decrees. If the will of humans is firmly planted in this lost state, it stands

²⁸⁵ Consider these two quotations as examples: "Were there even one datum of knowledge, however small, unknown to God, His rule would break down at that point. To be Lord over all the creation, He must possess all knowledge. And were God lacking one infinitesimal modicum of power, that lack would end His reign and undo His kingdom; that one stray atom of power would belong to someone else and God would be a limited ruler and hence not sovereign" (A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961] 108). "If there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God's sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled" (RC Sproul, *Chosen by God* [Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986] 26-27). Referring to Sproul's view, Pinnock retorts: "How boring it would be for God to have to reign over a creation project, each molecule of which has its predestined place! There would be nothing for God to do" (*Most Moved Mover*, 100).

²⁸⁶ "God is said to be absolutely free because no one and no thing can hinder Him or compel Him or stop Him. He is able to do as He pleases always, everywhere, forever" (Tozer, *Knowledge*, 109).

to reason that the only way people can be saved is if God violates their will to do it. In another epistle, Paul says that this lost state is tantamount to a dead person (Eph. 2:1). It is not difficult to understand that a corpse cannot save itself, yet this is the spiritual state of a person controlled by the sinful mind and nature.

It seems that the very act of salvation involves, at least initially, a violation of the will of the individual. Humans are willingly in active rebellion against God, controlled by the sinful mind and unable to please God – and they are completely content to continue doing so. This will of rebellion must first be broken in order for fallen humans to come to faith in God.

Even if one were to take an Arminian position on total depravity and posit a prevenient grace, which then frees the individual to make a choice to follow God, this still does not remove the violation of freewill.²⁸⁷ In fact, even prevenient grace must assume a violation of freewill.²⁸⁸

Back to the issue of love, it can be seen that even love which is initially coerced can result in genuine love.²⁸⁹ Just like the person intending to jump to death from the window ledge, so too a sinner is snatched away from sure death by the grace of God, and despite this being initially against that person's will, he or she comes to fully and completely appreciate God for doing it. Recognising their own inability, they thank God for violating their freedom of will. It is hard to imagine any person in heaven who will complain that their will was violated when they were saved despite it.

It makes little practical difference if humans go to an eternal hell by the preordained decree of God or by their own, personal choice. Does the latter make God any more loving than the former, when he created humans either knowing that many would go to hell

²⁸⁷ Having said all this concerning freewill, the term itself is questionable. The fallacy is that all the time open theists want to maintain the freewill of humans, as granted by God, they ignore that an unredeemed person's will is in bondage to Satan and to sin. The notion of "free" will seems biblically wrongheaded when speaking of unredeemed humans.

²⁸⁸ Some might say that prevenient grace simply frees the individual, i.e., moves the person from a state of slavery to sin to one in which now there exists freedom to choose. Previously, before prevenient grace, the individual was not actually free to choose, but now he is. However, this seems to beg the question. If people were asked before prevenient grace if they were happy to rebel against God, they would answer in the affirmative. No one is forcing them to rebel. They rebel of their own will and choice. Even prevenient grace, then, must involve a violation of the will of humans. This stands to reason when considering Paul's argument that there are only two types of people, those controlled by the Spirit and those controlled by the sinful mind (Rom. 8:1-11). Prevenient grace is normally placed *before* conversion, which means that even after the grace, the person would still be controlled by the sinful mind. Someone can hardly be considered controlled by the Spirit of Christ before their conversion and profession of faith in Jesus.

²⁸⁹ Even arranged marriages can result in relationships which are healthy, strong, and loving even if initially one or both of the parties did not want to enter the marriage.

(exhaustive divine foreknowledge), or having a reasonable idea that they would (“limited”²⁹⁰ omniscience)?

Suppose someone’s son has a propensity for jumping off bridges, a most perilous behavioural quirk. As the child’s loving parent, there are several options that parent can take. The parent can take him to the first bridge available and push the son off before he has a chance to decide to do so himself. The parent can take him to a bridge and allow him to exercise his freedom of will to either jump or not jump. Or the parent can avoid taking him to bridges altogether. Which option seems to be the most loving thing to do?

Hopefully using such an analogy will begin to show how difficult it is to define “love” and then apply it to God. The third option seems to be the most loving thing to do, but God has obviously not chosen that option in reality. Open theists believe that God’s love is quintessentially displayed in his desire for humans to act freely, but that can hardly be determined to be loving given certain scenarios. In the second option, is the parent really loving? Once the son jumps off the bridge, is it right to conclude, “Well, at least the parent gave him a choice. There was a reasonable notion that the son would kill himself, but the parent loved him enough to allow him that choice?”²⁹¹

Does God love the individual’s freewill more than the individual? This question also spawns another, equally difficult question: If God created free-willed beings which in turn can destroy the freedom of other free-willed beings, does this negate the original premise that God wanted to create a world where humans are indeed free? In other words, if God is so concerned to not violate or prohibit the freedom of humans, why create other beings (whether human or angelic) which do so? It seems nearly impossible for God to create any world where the freedom of humans is never violated.

Combining both of the original open theism presuppositions, a good question to ask is, “Which is the more loving thing for God to do, save a person against that person’s will, or allow that person to exercise it even if it means destroying himself or herself?” Put another way, does God love the person more than he loves that person’s freedom of will? Is God more interested in preserving individuals than preserving the concept of freewill? Open theists seem to lean more toward the latter than the former. They appear more concerned that

²⁹⁰ To claim that the adherents of Open Theism hold to a “limited” omniscience on the part of God is actually a misnomer. From the conservative angle, it would certainly seem that way, but open theists are merely saying that God knows everything that *can* be known. Because the free-willed actions of humans cannot be known beforehand, God cannot know them. He has full omniscience, then, of those things which can be known. Still, when compared to the traditional definition of omniscience, this does seem to be limiting the omniscience of God, no matter the semantics.

²⁹¹ The first option tends to be the caricatured position open theists use when describing Calvinism’s understanding of election, a most unfair characterisation to make.

the concept of freewill not be violated, even if this means the total destruction of the individual, than for the individual to be saved and his or her freewill violated in the process. They seem to love freewill more than the individual who supposedly possesses it, and they fashion God in their own image in this respect.²⁹² But what is more loving, for God to allow people to destroy themselves, or to save them even if initially they do not want to be saved?²⁹³

The following summarises the findings with these two fundamental presuppositions of open theists.

God respects human freedom and will not violate it. But God does in fact violate human freedom, and this is seen most clearly in his acts of judgment. Therefore, it is a reasonable supposition to make that God also violates human freedom even when it comes to salvation.

True love cannot be forced or coerced. But true love can come out of a situation which initially involved coercion. The universal attitude of Christians is that they are appreciative that, despite their active rebellion against God, God saved them anyway. Even though this involved a violation of their will, they are grateful that God saved them, recognising their previous poverty of spirit and inability of fallen nature. This issues in genuine appreciation and love for God and what he has done, realising that had God not violated their will, they would be eternally lost.

3.4.3 Conclusion to Theological Evaluation

Traditional evangelicalism can at times appear cold and harsh. The teaching that salvation is only found in a personal proclamation of faith in Jesus Christ apparently shuts out the vast majority of humanity who have never heard about Jesus. Evangelical inclusivists are attempting to make that salvation wider and more accessible than historically believed in evangelical circles. One way to do that is to manipulate the classical theism of evangelicalism.

²⁹² Boyd: “God’s love and wrath unite in allowing creatures to go their own way throughout eternity” (2001:354). This Boyd calls “the dignity of eternally choosing against [God]” (343, n. 6).

²⁹³ Sanders’ doctoral dissertation at UNISA, “Divine Providence as Risk-Taking” (1996), formed the basis of his well-known book, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998). “God cannot prevent all the evil in the world and still maintain the conditions of fellowship intended by his first order desire” (304, emphasis original). That desire is to grant humans freedom to choose in an environment which includes “the power of love” (36). However, Sanders seems to hedge on this ideal of absolute human freedom, speaking of “freedom within limits” (44) and making this interesting comment: “God persuades, commands, gives comfort, and *sometimes brings judgment* in order to get humans to sign on to his project” (67, emphasis added). But is this not simply a form of coercion? Much like a parent punishes his child in order to change the child’s behaviour, is this not precisely what Sanders is saying God does? Boyd admits something similar: “It is difficult to make sense of the biblical certainty that in the eschaton God will defeat all those who oppose him unless we assume that God possesses the power to unilaterally revoke the freedom of his opponents” (2001:184). For all their talk of human freedom, it seems that even the open theists have some reservations on this score.

As noble as their desire may be, the final product must be soundly rejected. For the Soteriology of inclusivism to stick, their Theology-proper must be altered in the following ways. It must maintain a bifurcation between the Old and New Testament portraits of God, but this appears more Marcionite than biblical, and relies on a common misconception that God as portrayed in the Old Testament is decidedly less loving than the “God of Jesus.” It must abandon classical attributes of God such as his immutability, eternity, and omniscience, but this has negative consequences on God’s ability to save and the believer’s ability to trust him fully for that salvation, and his ability to adequately judge sin. And it overemphasises the love of God as the most important attribute to the apparent neglect of other attributes, namely, his wrath and justice.

Even the primary goals of inclusivists and open theists are not attained by the above changes. As noted, their desire to preserve human freedom is not achieved, nor their desire to preserve a truly loving picture of God. By elevating human freedom to an abnormally high state, they have lowered God to a deficient level.

3.5 What Effect Does Sin Have on Human Ability to Seek God?

A Hamartiological Reflection on Judgment

American evangelicals have by and large made the topic of sin a primary platform of their formulation of Christian doctrine. World missions has benefited in no small part due to an American mindset which views humans as lost sinners in need of the message of hope and salvation in Christ Jesus.²⁹⁴ This has been such a strong tendency in American evangelicalism that any talk of salvation which does not make sin a major aspect is generally looked upon with great suspicion by the greater evangelical community.

This is simply because sin has been verbalised as the primary problem of fallen humanity. Philanthropic concerns such as caring for one’s neighbour or helping the indigent or needy certainly are important in the life of a disciple of Jesus, but they are not the primary problem which needs to be addressed in a Christian formulation of salvation. Sin is the problem. An evangelical system of salvation which does not start with sin or speak at length about it is usually seen as suspect.

Enter inclusivism and its formulation of salvation. As noted in the Introduction,

²⁹⁴ The quintessential source for demographic information concerning the evangelical world missions movement today is found in Patrick Johnstone’s and Jason Mandryk’s *Operation World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001). Of the 201,260 total workforce of Protestant missionaries in the world, over half of these [110,466 or 54.9%] originate from the United States (2001:4, 751). The vast majority of these come from evangelically-minded organisations (733).

inclusivism should be commended for its attempts at defining Christian salvation in as broad a scheme as possible within evangelical boundaries. The problem rests in the paucity of discussion concerning sin and its effects on humanity. The desire to see the effects of Christ's atoning work spread to as wide a field of humanity as possible is admirable, but at what expense to a proper view of the effects of sin? Why in a discussion about salvation is so little said about sin in inclusivist material? Is it not right to wonder why, if looking to understand the fate of the unevangelised, sin does not play a more prominent role in the inclusivist's formulations?

This question must be particularly asked when evaluating inclusivism's positivistic view of non-Christian religions and the morality of their adherents. Evangelical critics of inclusivism have rightly asked how it can be determined that people apart from faith in Christ are morally good, when God's Word seems to speak oppositely? In this coverage of Hamartiology, these concerns will be addressed.

For example, taking the six main books used so far in evaluating Pinnock's views, there is relatively little discussion concerning sin and its effects. In a book devoted to the mercy of God, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, Pinnock says surprisingly little at all about sin. Would it not be right to argue that God's mercy is made necessary due to the presence of humanity's sin? It would be preferable to see more discussion about it by him.

In *Flame*, there are bits of comments which brush upon the topic, but the only substantive material addressing anything about sin and its effects on humanity are found in Pinnock's disagreements with Anselm's formulations (107-109). In two books for which Pinnock provides chapters, *Openness* and *Four Views*, he makes no mention at all about sin and its effects. Granted, in *Openness* the point is not salvation per se but the person of God, much like in *Most Moved Mover*, where Pinnock also says nothing about sin and how that affects humanity's relationship with God. Those two books concentrate more on Theology-proper than Soteriology. But in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, it is disconcerting that an evangelical can talk about the fate of the unevangelised and not broach the topic of sin.

There is more promise in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, for which Pinnock serves as general editor. In the opening section where Pinnock summarises his theological pilgrimage, human sinfulness is dealt with. This specifically comes in the material where Pinnock critiques his own Calvinist heritage which he ultimately abandoned, going through five main topics as commonly represented in American Calvinism by the acronym TULIP. Pinnock contrasts an Augustinian and Calvinist approach to human sinfulness versus that of Wesley (21-22). It is also at this point that he introduces prevenient grace, another topic for

this section of the dissertation.

Pinnock believes that the Calvinist understanding of sin does not properly allow for human freedom of choice. Levelling his criticism at “total depravity,” Pinnock goes back to Jesus as he often does: “Was there any evidence that Jesus, for example, regarded people as totally depraved?” (22). A reworking of what it really means to be a sinner became necessary in Pinnock’s pilgrimage. Despite the fact that human beings are sinners, it appears that sin does not hamper their ability to choose to follow God. Note this key comment by Pinnock:

“What became decisive for me was the simple fact that Scripture appeals to people as those who are able and responsible to answer to God (however we explain it) and not as those incapable of doing so, as Calvinian logic would suggest. The gospel addresses them as free and responsible agents, and I must suppose it does so because that is what they are” (22).

Unfortunately, Pinnock himself does not expand upon these few statements about sin and its effects on humans. Some passing remarks concerning sin are made by others throughout the book, but the only real treatment of the subject comes by Bruce Reichenbach, professor of philosophy at Augsburg College in Minneapolis, in his chapter “Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility.”²⁹⁵ However, even here the main point is human freedom and how that corresponds to divine sovereignty. Reichenbach is more concerned that a view of sin and its effects not limit human freedom.

“If we are to be free, not only must we be able to *act* according to our choices, but we must also be able to *choose* to act otherwise than we did” (286, emphasis original).

All of this is interesting to consider, but any thorough treatment of it would take away from the main point of this dissertation.

Returning to Pinnock, there are three main arguments he has used in defence of his notion that sinful human beings, apart from any special revelation from God (especially knowing about Jesus and what he did), may still turn to God and find themselves pleasing to him. These three arguments involve the salvific benefits of general revelation, God’s use of

²⁹⁵ The chapter just previous to this one by Jerry L. Walls, “Divine Commands, Predestination, and Moral Intuition,” lightly addresses the topic, but the main thrust of the chapter concerns unconditional predestination and how it is morally repugnant to most people. Walls aims to show that the view of predestination typical to Luther, Calvin and their ilk has at its basis a misunderstanding of human moral intuition. He notes that the doctrine is repugnant, not because sinners cannot rightly understand it as Luther and Calvin would conclude, but because it is in fact morally repugnant and as humans we implicitly recognise this. “While I do not deny the corrupting influence of sin on our moral faculties, I would argue nevertheless that our moral faculties are part of the remaining image of God in man. As such they are a basically reliable reflection of God’s love and justice” (274).

prevenient grace in drawing people to himself, and the existence of the image of God in humanity which naturally inclines humans to turn to God. These same arguments are used by other inclusivists, as noted earlier, but Pinnock has the most organised presentation of them.

3.5.1 An Evaluation of Inclusivism's View of General Revelation

As hinted in the Pneumatology section, discussions concerning the potential salvific benefits of general revelation often fall under one's coverage of the Holy Spirit. However, it has been placed here in the Hamartiology section for one basic reason. The approach of the inclusivists (similar to that of the pluralists) often fails on their positive evaluation of general revelation because of their inadequate doctrine of sin and its effects on humanity. In other words, they often divorce the topics of general revelation and sin, and this produces a faulty view of the salvific effects of general revelation most certainly possessed by pluralists, and flirted with by inclusivists.²⁹⁶ Placing the discussion here is a blatant attempt to not fall into that same mistake.

The positive view inclusivists have for non-Christian religions has already extensively been covered. The main reason why they have such a positive view is because of their Pneumatology. However, they are also positive about non-Christian faiths via the reasoning that humanity's religious sphere is part of God's general revelation. Hence, people will be judged by the amount of light they have been given. In other words, even though for many people special revelation does not exist (eg., knowing Jesus by name), general revelation does exist for all people everywhere, and God positively uses it to draw people to himself. This positive view of general revelation, when coupled with the universal ministry of God's Spirit, makes for a powerful argument in the inclusivist's favour.

But the inclusivist understanding of "general revelation" itself needs defining, since they include human religion and culture in this category. The following two comments by Pinnock on this score have already been noted:

"Religions provide a window of opportunity for the Spirit to engage people, because . . . God is also mysteriously present and working" (*Four Views*, 116).

"Revelation is embodied in other religions" (*Four Views*, 118).

²⁹⁶ It should be noted here that a distinct difference between different brands of inclusivism can be seen when it comes to the effects of general or natural revelation. Because Catholics have historically been more favourable to natural theology than has typically been the case in evangelical circles, one would expect a difference when it comes to the views on natural theology between Catholic inclusivists and their evangelical counterparts. However, for the present purposes, since this study is concentrating on evangelical inclusivists, that difference will not be a cause for difficulty.

The choice is actually rather simple. Do evangelicals side with a traditionally evangelical view of non-Christian religions as human-made products and thus “false,” or do they side with Pinnock’s understanding of these faiths as examples of general revelation through which God is wooing humankind to himself?

General revelation has normally been understood as that which God does, through his works, to reveal himself. It has not usually been understood in evangelical circles to mean something which is produced from the side of humanity, as appears to be the case in the inclusivist usage of the term. Religion and culture appear to be human products and as such, would not normally be classified as examples of general revelation.

The earlier evaluation of the biblical material concerning non-Judeo-Christian faiths seems to bear this out. If religion truly were part of God’s general revelation of himself to humanity, one would not expect the vast amount of negative material said about the non-Judeo-Christian traditions that is found in Scripture. Nor would it be expected that such categories as idolatry and demon worship are used as appropriate terms for these religions, but again, Scripture does precisely this.

Inclusivism’s positive portrayal of general revelation is intimately linked to its view concerning pagan saints. But as has already been noted, each and every example of pagan saints that inclusivists produce has at its heart not general but special revelation (with the only possible exception being Melchizedek, since Scripture is silent on how he originally came to know of Jehovah). These “holy pagans” came to know of the one, true God, not through their pagan cultures or religions, but via special contact either with God, or God’s people, or the message about the one, true God.

For the sake of clarity, consider Pinnock’s use of Melchizedek in this regard. After arguing in *Flame of Love* that the Spirit does work through the religious realm, he moves to a more general observation: “It would be strange if the Spirit excused himself from the very arena of culture where people search for meaning” (203). Pinnock further notes that “religion is an important segment of culture” (203), and he sandwiches the account of Melchizedek between these two propositions. According to Pinnock, the story of Melchizedek teaches that God was “at work in Canaanite culture” (203). His conclusion on the matter is found in the pages that follow and can be crystallised in the following two quotations:

“Because of the Spirit’s ubiquitous inspiration, we do well to be open to people of other faiths” (205).

“Spirit, present in the whole world and at work among all peoples, is at work in the sphere of religious life . . .” (207).²⁹⁷

Therefore, because Pinnock’s argument for the working of the Holy Spirit in the religious sphere is rooted in his understanding of pagan saints, and because as previously noted his arguments in this regard fail to satisfy, evangelicals must look with a wary eye at his broader conclusion concerning general revelation as well.

3.5.1.1 Biblical Analysis

A further difficulty emerges when evaluating this positive view of general revelation on biblical grounds. It is one thing for evangelical inclusivists to view general revelation positively, but quite another to provide biblical support for such a position. What should be known is if their positive conclusion concerning general revelation is *a priori* presupposed given the theological necessity of it which inheres in their inclusivism. In other words, is their view of general revelation inductively gained from Scripture, or deductively, i.e., first assumed to be true given their inclusivist presuppositions, and then found to be true by selectively considering the biblical data.

A typical complaint levelled against traditional evangelicalism from the inclusivist camp concerns the understanding of the first chapter of Romans. Evangelicals have customarily understood Paul’s explanation in verses 18-20 as a passage against the salvific benefits of general revelation. Put another way, God reveals enough of himself through creation to leave humankind ‘without excuse,’ yet not enough to save them. This appears to inclusivists as unfair. They argue that if general revelation is enough to condemn humans, it should be enough to save them as well.

However, inclusivists seem to cut the argument short, dealing almost exclusively with the first two chapters of Romans, but not continuing on to chapter three.²⁹⁸ Paul’s argument which begins in the first chapter does not conclude until the third. It would be helpful to

²⁹⁷ In his conclusion to this section, Pinnock supports his argument with an equally questionable proposition, namely, that just as the religion of the Jews prepared the way for Christ, so can other religions perform an equal task. “Here [in Israel] God was at work apart from Jesus Christ but leading up to him. By analogy with Israel, we watch for anticipations in other faiths to be fulfilled in Christ” (208). Surely, however, this analogy is doomed to failure and makes one wonder why Pinnock would even include it. How can the religion of the Jews, God’s chosen people and the ultimate generator of the Messiah, be compared to any other religion in this way?

²⁹⁸ An example of this is found in *Wideness*, where Pinnock comments briefly on the general knowledge of God which is accessible to both Jews and Gentiles (33). Here Pinnock ends with Romans 2:14-16, but he does not continue to follow Paul’s thoughts into chapter 3 on what was done with this general knowledge of God. In essence Pinnock rips the more positive statements of Paul out of their context, which makes his immediate point appear stronger.

briefly trace his argument in these opening chapters, to see if indeed the inclusivist understanding can be maintained.

The dominant theme of these three chapters is the judgment of God. In fact, it is hard to maintain the positive inclusivist understanding of these chapters in light of this dominant theme. Paul is not discussing how humans can be saved. That discussion comes toward the end of chapter 3. After a long introduction, Paul begins his discussion of the wrath of God in 1:18 and this, along with the fallenness of humanity, dominates the discussion for 64 verses, up to 3:20. The general tenor of this entire section is negative, not positive, and the condemnation of sinful humanity is clearly established, not a roadmap for their salvation through general revelation.

Moving from the broader scope to the more specific, Paul speaks of several reasons why God's wrath and judgment are being revealed against humanity. The first is because humanity has suppressed the truth about God which is plainly known through his creation (1:18-20). Rather than a positive portrayal of humanity's response to natural theology, these verses form the heart of a diatribe against sinful humanity and its rejection of the Creator. In fact, there appears to be enough revelation through creation for Paul to say that things have been "made plain" to humans, enough to condemn them for their rejection of it and to leave them "without excuse" (literally in the Greek, *anapologētos*, "without defence").

It should be noted that, although arguments from silence are never in and of themselves a wise way to approach Scripture, it is nonetheless striking that Paul does not use this opportunity to formulate a positive portrait of general revelation. In fact, it would seem that he had a great opportunity to contrast those who have not positively responded to God's revelation through creation with those who have. However, juxtaposed with this rejection of natural revelation a positive response to it is not found, but rather an argument that those who respond in faith to the message of righteousness as revealed in Christ will be saved. Put another way, there is not Group A as the people who reject natural revelation versus Group B as the people who do positively respond to it. Rather, there is Group A as the people who reject natural revelation juxtaposed with Group C as the people who are justified by faith (3:22). It is a real possibility that Group B does not exist as a category in Paul's mind.

Paul concludes the first chapter with three instances of God "giving over" sinful humans to their wicked designs, and this could be seen as one way in which God's wrath is being revealed. He allows them to go, as it were, their own way. God gave them over to degrading their bodies (vss. 24-25), to "shameful lusts" (vss. 26-27), and to "depraved minds" (vs. 28). From this giving over, sinful humans spiralled further and further downward into a cesspool

of wickedness and depravity (vss. 29-32). All of this was because they did not consider it “worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God” (vs. 28).

A second reason why God’s wrath is being revealed against humanity concerns hypocritical judgment by humans who believe themselves to be in the position of judging their fellow humans. Chapter 2 begins with what most commentators believe to be a condemnation of Paul’s Jewish brethren who stand in judgment of the Gentiles, yet also commit sins which deserve the condemnation of God.

A third reason concerns unrepentance (2:5f). Not only is God’s judgment being revealed, but so evidently is his kindness (2:4) which, unfortunately, has gone ignored. It is in the next verses of this passage in chapter 2 that inclusivists find some hope for their position, as Paul lays out an apparent plan of salvation which appears to come apart from special knowledge of Jesus Christ. Paul quotes the Old Testament in verse 6, in which it states that “God will give to each person according to what he has done.”

The next verses continue in what appears to be major support for the inclusivist position, found both in its teaching about justification as coming through doing good, and the fact that God does not show favouritism (vs. 11). This latter point is key, since traditional evangelicalism seems to say that God does show favouritism, at least to those who know about Jesus and confess him. Whereas for the inclusivist, this lack of favouritism on the part of God must drive one to the conclusion that God allows others outside the scope of explicit knowledge of Jesus to nonetheless do works of righteousness commendable by God and which are, in some way, salvific.

Romans 2:6 is therefore a key text for inclusivism, and inclusivists have not been shy in attempting to exploit it. Pinnock, for example, notes that people who live outside the knowledge of Jesus Christ, what he calls “informationally premessianic” (*Wideness*, 161), can be saved by positively responding to the general revelation they have received. Just like Job, who never knew about Jesus Christ, so too could a twentieth-century Mongolian be saved by acting in faith with the light he or she has received in general revelation.²⁹⁹ Sanders notes that this is a general conclusion and key point of inclusivism, that people can act in faith, perform works pleasing to God, and be saved, even if they do not have knowledge of Christ (*No Other Name*, 235).

It is here that inclusivists appear to make a hermeneutical error, however. Paul’s argument does not end in chapter 2 of Romans. In fact, it is just heating up. If the conclusion

²⁹⁹ Pinnock also uses the Parable of the Sheep and Goats from Matthew 25 as further proof of this (*Wideness*, 163-164), something already dealt with in detail.

were made from these verses that Paul believed that people apart from the knowledge of Jesus could somehow be saved by their good works, not only would it be contradicting a vast body of writing from his other epistles, it would also be contradicting the more immediate context of Romans.

In fact, there appears to be just such a contradiction in these opening chapters. Consider the following two verses:

Romans 2:13 – “For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.”

Romans 3:20 – “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.”

There appears to be a glaring inconsistency, to put it mildly, in Paul’s words in this two verses. On the surface, what Paul says in 2:13 is flatly contradicted just 36 verses later. How can Paul make such an obvious error? Concerning the specific issue at hand, it appears that evangelical exclusivists concentrate on 3:20 to the neglect of 2:13, while evangelical inclusivists appear to do the exact opposite. Is there no way to understand these two verses such that a harmony can be reached between them?

The apparent contradiction may be simple to resolve once the topic of discussion in each passage is discovered. Whereas in 2:13 Paul is moving through a discussion about God’s judgment begun in the previous chapter, in 3:20 Paul moves to the matter of salvation. In between these two verses is a rather large section devoted to the sinfulness of humans. It is here where inclusivism apparently stumbles.

The key verse is 2:12: “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.” The phrase “all who sin” forms the heart of this verse, and in missing this point, one is most likely to miss the point of the entire passage. “All who sin” condemns everyone.

In the verses which follow 2:12, Paul provides two more reasons why God’s wrath has been revealed. It is revealed against Jews who break the law, and against Gentiles who violate their own conscience. Inclusivists see in Paul’s discussion about Gentile conscience a positive understanding, whereby those who have never heard about Jesus or who have never received the law may in fact stand justified before God so long as they obey their conscience. To be sure, Paul does say that sometimes Gentiles are commended by their conscience (vs. 15), but he also says that it condemns them as well. Put another way, at times Gentiles may in fact obey their conscience, but at other times they knowingly violate it.

Again, a positive reading of this passage which concludes that via conscience, Gentiles can stand commended before God, is not justified. Just as surely as Paul is not saying that there are some Jews who, through perfect obedience to the law, stand justified before God, he is also not saying that there are some Gentiles who, through perfect obedience to their conscience, stand justified before God. Paul's overall conclusion concerning the law and conscience is negative, not positive.³⁰⁰

Paul is not contradicting himself in these two passages. Rather, he is making the point that God's righteous judgment comes via the works of humans, while his salvation comes only through faith. "While, for Paul, forgiveness and eternal life are utterly of God's grace, divine judgment (as uniformly in the Bible) is always passed in accordance with what men and women have done" (Bruce, 1989:84). "Since knowledge of God is mediated to all by general revelation, human accountability to God is firmly established. Hence in practice, general revelation becomes a vehicle not for salvation but for divine judgment" (Demarest, 1982:246).

Paul's "what shall we conclude then" (3:9) should be seen as the conclusion to his grand argument which began in 1:18. And his "all who sin" of 2:12 should be seen as tied together with 3:9: "Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin." Romans 3:10-18 is the grand conclusion of the matter, and a grand condemnation of sinful humanity. It is hard once this entire section has been digested, to maintain that general revelation is a means through which humanity can be saved. Rather, it is one of the ways God has plainly revealed himself to humanity yet, through its sinful and wilful suppression of the truth, humanity stands condemned, whether Jew or Gentile. "All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (3:12).

Only upon establishing a solid Hamartiology does Paul then move to Soteriology. If the law could not bring righteousness (3:20; see also Gal. 2:16b, 21; 3:11, 21b, 24); if humanity through its wickedness has suppressed the truth found in natural revelation; if Gentiles are often accused by their consciences; and if "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23), how then does salvation come? It can come only through grace and faith in Jesus as a "sacrifice of atonement" (3:25). For "all who sin," there can be no other possibility.

This is why Calvin made a dichotomy in his *Institutes* between knowledge of God as creator and knowledge of God as redeemer. He understood general revelation in this way, as

³⁰⁰ Thus Nash can say, "Nowhere in Romans 1-3 does Paul give general revelation enhanced status as an instrument of salvation (*Destiny of the Unevangelized*, 111).

twisted by sinful humans and unable to save them (see *Institutes*, 1.4; 1.5.11-15; 1.6.1), something to which Pinnock vehemently objects (*Four Views*, 190-191).

To be clear, it is not general revelation that is at fault. Rather, it is sinful humanity which has so warped the revelation so as to make it worthless to save. Humanity's inability to know God stems not only from the infinite/finite divide, but also because human thinking has become twisted. The Pharisees serve as an excellent example of those who, in the face of special revelation, were still hardened to it by their own sinful inclinations. This being the case, it is not hard to understand sinful humanity acting similarly with general revelation, the content of which is not as salvifically clear as special revelation.

Demarest gives a good summary of what humankind can discern about God from general revelation. He includes the following (243):

“God exists (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19)	God is wise (Ps. 104:24)
God is uncreated (Acts 17:24)	God is good (Acts 14:17)
God is Creator (Acts 14:15)	God is righteous (Rom. 1:32)
God is Sustainer (Acts 14:16; 17:25)	God has a sovereign will (Acts 17:26)
God is universal Lord (Acts 17:24)	God has standards of right and wrong (Rom. 2:15)
God is transcendent (Acts 17:24)	God should be worshiped (Acts 14:15; 17:23)
God is immanent (Acts 17:26-27)	Man should perform the good (Rom. 2:15)
God is eternal (Ps. 93:2)	God is majestic (Ps. 29:4)
God is great (Ps. 8:3-4)	God is powerful (Ps. 29:4; Rom. 1:20)” ³⁰¹

But as Paul has said, humanity has “suppressed the truth” and thus general revelation falls, as it were, on deaf ears. For this reason, special revelation is necessary, a revelation that makes general revelation salvifically understandable. It is noted that in Demarest's list above, nothing is said about the *how* of worship, or what is the right way by which a sinner can have a relationship with this God revealed generally. Special revelation is needed to overcome the damage done by the fall of humanity into sin and rebellion. Without the special revelation of God's Word, knowledge of Christ as Lord and Saviour, and the work of the Holy Spirit, general revelation is suppressed by humans. “God must not only make Himself *known* to man, but He must make Himself known *to* man.”³⁰²

³⁰¹ In this list, Acts 17 plays a major role in Demarest's conclusions. Inclusivists have also used this passage as further proof of their position. However, Paul's speech to the Athenians concludes with talk of the judgment of God (vs. 31). This is yet another example of inclusivists missing something of importance in Scripture. In their attempt to be highly positive, they tend to ignore the negative messages of Scripture.

³⁰² Robert E. Friedman, “Calvin's Doctrine of General Revelation,” MA thesis, Wheaton Graduate School, 1963, emphasis original. Calvin notes, “... but as the whole world gained nothing in point of instruction from the circumstances, that God had exhibited his wisdom in his creatures, He then resorted to another method for

3.5.1.2 The Name of Jesus

However, is not all of the above moot given the inclusivist understanding that the atoning work of Jesus is in fact the only means by which salvation can come? In other words, inclusivists profess that salvation is only through Jesus Christ. This being the case, they recognise the sinfulness of humanity and the need for Jesus to come into the world.

In fact, in commenting on Romans 2, Pinnock makes this thoughtful observation:

“Granted, Paul is stressing the failure of sinners to respond to God in order to show why Jesus had to come. He is insisting that humanity cannot save itself apart from the work of God in redemption” (*Wideness*, 33).

The disconnect in inclusivist thinking, though, comes with *knowledge* of this saving work in Jesus. Individuals do not need to know what has been done in the incarnation. All they need to know is that God exists, and they must act in faith given that knowledge. The difficulty with such a view, though, is that it appears unsupported by Scripture. There is little evidence in the Bible that salvation is available outside explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ, or is somehow mediated by culture and non-Christian traditions.

Several New Testament passages bear this out. Acts 4:12 is perhaps the most readily used verse to support the idea that the name of Jesus is important in the salvation process. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” It is difficult to accept the inclusivist interpretation of this verse to mean that just because salvation is in Jesus, this does not exclude its possibility elsewhere. The verse appears quite exclusivist in its declaration. Therefore, it is hard to understand how Sanders can conclude that this passage does not state that explicit knowledge of Jesus is necessary. As noted earlier, Sanders believes an individual can benefit from the exclusive salvation found in Christ, without actually knowing about it. It is here that the *name* of Jesus is important to recognise in this passage. Indeed, it is hard to envision a missionary enterprise in the early years of Christianity which did not have at its heart the urgency of spreading the knowledge of Jesus to those who formerly did not know about him.

In fact, Paul makes this the backbone of his ministry to the Jews and Gentiles. “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15; also vs. 27). Philip had earlier identified the gospel with the name of Jesus (Acts 8:12, 35), and in John’s short epistle he notes that it was “for the sake of

instructing men. Thus it must be reckoned as our own fault, that we do not attain a saving acquaintance with God, before we have been emptied of our own understanding” (*The Commentaries of John Calvin*, various translators, 46 volumes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1946) commentary on 1 Cor. 1:21).

the Name” that early believers spread the good news (3 Jn. 7). Paul addresses his letter to the church at Corinth “together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:2). Even those opposed to the gospel message recognised that the name of Jesus was the central focus of the early Christian missionaries (eg., Acts 4:17-30; 5:28, 40; Saul of Tarsus recognised this as well, 28:9). The subjection of demons is further proof that the name of Jesus was of primary importance (eg., Acts 19:13). This emphasis on the name of Jesus, then, appears to support an exclusivist contention that explicit knowledge of Christ is necessary for salvation.

A statement from John’s Gospel makes a similar point. “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (Jn. 3:18). When coupled with John 14:6, it is hard to escape exclusivist conclusions.

When observing what the faith is upon, this is even more remarkable. Inclusivism appears to make faith rest upon God as known via general revelation, but Scripture lays the emphasis on Christ. “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:11-12). In the very next verse, John speaks of the name of the Son of God as the object of saving faith.

The editors of *Four Views* note as problematic in inclusivism “the lack of a qualitative distinction between God’s personal action in Jesus Christ and his universal presence” (25). This is important to note. Pinnock has made the universal activity of God’s Spirit a fundamental tenet of his Soteriology, thus supporting his notion that general revelation can indeed be salvific. But has he not sacrificed the particularity of Jesus in the process? If the content of general revelation is sufficient to save, and if people can enjoy the benefits of Christ’s atoning work without even knowing him or about him, at what point can it truly be said that Jesus is the only Saviour of the world? When coupled with the inclusivist understanding about Saul of Tarsus or Cornelius, both supposedly saved whether or not they ever came to a knowledge of Christ, it is hard to believe inclusivists when they say that Jesus is the only means of salvation.

Inclusivism appears to make a mistake that liberal Christianity has often made. That mistake is to assume that it is the *teaching* of Jesus alone that matters, and not his person. This has led liberal scholars, and apparently inclusivist ones as well, to conclude that so long as a person is living a life in conformity with the teaching of Jesus, that person must be saved by Jesus as well. But as noted above, as well as in the Christology section, the *person* of

Jesus is equally vital, and Scripture emphasises a relationship with Christ, not simply doing in accidental fashion what he taught.

In conclusion, evangelicals should remain sceptical at best toward the inclusivist conclusion that general revelation can be salvific, and that explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ is not necessary for salvation. As much as evangelicals may hope that the fate of the unevangelised can be positively portrayed via this inclusivist understanding of general revelation, it appears to be biblically weak.³⁰³

3.5.2 An Evaluation of Inclusivism's Understanding of the Image of God

The image of God in humankind is a thorny theological area. The competing views throughout the history of the church as to what precisely constitutes the image of God or *imago Dei* are multifold. It is not within the scope of this dissertation to delineate all these views. However, the inclusivist understanding of the *imago Dei* must be evaluated nonetheless, because it impinges directly upon their understanding of non-Christian religions. Recall, this is one reason why Pinnock noted that nobility and truth can be found in non-Christian faiths, because of the existence of the image of God in all people.

Much is made by pluralists and inclusivists that many if not all of the world's religions have truth. One prominent argument used to bolster their position that these religions are salvific (pluralist) or at least used by God to draw people to Christ (inclusivist) is to note the morality of many of the adherents of these religions. From this, it is argued, Christianity and its followers look little different. Therefore, these non-Christian religions must stand on equal footing or at least be granted a better hearing than has traditionally been the case in evangelicalism.³⁰⁴

On the surface this argument seems at first compelling. However, one would expect to find some truth in any given religion, or else it would probably not stand as a religion. But just because a beast has two hands, two legs, two arms, two ears, and a mouth does not make it a human being, no matter what similarities to humans it might have otherwise. The same can be said about religions which are at odds with Christianity. If they were devoid of absolutely all truth, it is doubted that such religions could woo members.

³⁰³ Many other passages could be covered in this section, such as Rom. 10:9-15, but the above should suffice. Exclusivists have also noted that there are even biblical cases of people who had received special revelation, yet still needed to know Jesus in an explicit way in order to be saved (eg., the Samaritans, or the disciples of John the Baptist). Cornelius was noted as such an example. See *Four Views*, 238, for other examples.

³⁰⁴ Both the pluralist John Hick and the inclusivist Clark Pinnock use this argument in their discussions found in *Four Views*. Inclusivist Gerald McDermott brings this matter decidedly to the fore in his book *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?*

In fact, is it not the characteristic of counterfeits to have some similarities to the real thing? If non-Christian religions are inspired by Satan, as exclusivists normally claim (and as was seen in an earlier section does have some substantial biblical support), then should some elements of truth in those religions be expected? Recall, when Satan tempted Jesus, he quoted Scripture. Someone who counterfeits currency attempts to make the money appear as close as possible to the real thing. He does not just take any old piece of paper, scribble some figures on it, and attempt to pawn it off as legal tender. He crafts the counterfeit carefully, until it looks like the real thing. If Satan indeed “masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14), there can be an expectation of at least some non-Christian religions to have elements of truth in them. How else could Satan masquerade as an angel of light if this did not include possessing similar characteristics of one?³⁰⁵

Similarly, Jesus warns in the Olivet Discourse that “false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect, if that were possible” (Matt. 24:24). Evidently, these signs and wonders will appear similar to the legitimate signs performed by Christ’s disciples, otherwise they would have no deceptive quality.

Compounding this problem is the “image of God factor.” Scripture says that humans are created in God’s image, and as such form the pinnacle of his creative activity (Gen. 1:26-27). However, what does this mean exactly, to be created in God’s image?

In the fact that humans are in the image of God lay the essence and distinctiveness of human beings. Humans were created in the image of God and now *are* the image of God. Traces of this truth are found even in secular literature. Paul pointed out to the Athenians that some of their own poets have spoken of humans as the offspring of God (Acts 17:28).

If a survey throughout the Church’s history were provided of how this term has been viewed, no end to the competing categories would be seen.³⁰⁶ From these competing viewpoints, though, six general characteristics commonly attributed to the “image of God” could be gleaned. These six attributes are rational ability, bodily traits, moral characteristics, freedom or freewill, rulership and creativity, and immortality. Despite their differences, all of the schools of thought are in virtual agreement, be they Patristic Fathers or Orthodox Fathers, Reformers or Catholic scholars, liberal or conservative theologians, that the image of God constitutes at least in part a spiritual component that is not found in any other earthly creature.

³⁰⁵ It is recognised that Paul’s passage about Satan masquerading as an angel of light comes in the context of false apostles in the church, but it does not appear unjustified that Satan could also do this in other religious contexts outside the church as well.

³⁰⁶ For a thorough historical survey, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1984) 202f.

In other words, the image of God is that part of humans which yearns for fellowship with God.

There are different ways in which this may be worked out. Calvin, for example, spoke of the “*semen religionis*” within all humans (*Institutes*, 1.3.1-2). Barnes speaks of the “universal human religiosity” (1989:21) and Kraemer spoke of the “universal religious consciousness of humanity” (1938:114). Demarest speaks of this knowledge of God in three categories, “reminiscent knowledge,” “intuition knowledge,” and via “rational inference” (1982:227-232). “All men by reminiscence vaguely know that God exists, that He is all-powerful, just, and good, and that He is to be worshiped” (228). Examples can be multiplied, ones which cut across all denominational and ecclesiastical distinctions.³⁰⁷

The problem comes with the Fall and its effects on that image, and whether or not that desire for fellowship has been vitiated. It is one thing to point to the *imago Dei* as a reason for why so many religions exist. It is quite another to use it as proof that these religions must be viewed positively.

It must be determined what, if any, effect the Fall had on the image of God in humanity. Three broad options are available, either the image was not affected by the Fall, or part of the image was lost in the Fall, or all of the image was lost in the Fall. The first option is of no consequence here because inclusivists do not allow it. Clearly, the third option is also not applicable to inclusivists, since they allow for the image to remain and thus produce in non-Christian religions certain positive attributes. Therefore, the second option, that the image was damaged by the Fall, is where evangelicals must concentrate their attention as both evangelical exclusivists and inclusivists would fall under this categorisation.

It seems reasonable to agree with inclusivism’s contention that honourable attributes found in non-Christian faiths are at least in part a vestige of the image of God. However, it could equally be contended that some of these positive attributes are only there because of the counterfeiting work of Satan. Regardless, there appears to be no reason to argue the point further, because another more promising avenue exists to be investigated.

The question to be asked is, “Is the image of God the only thing with which we should allocate our thinking?” What of the image of Christ that is often spoken of in the New Testament? Put another way, is fallen humanity attempting to make its way back to that original, pristine state found in Eden, a human nature found in pre-Fall Adam, or are believers

³⁰⁷ Other classic statements of this truth could include Blaise Pascal’s “God-shaped vacuum” which exists in each human soul, and Augustine’s “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” Biblically, Ecclesiastes 3:11 echoes this truth, wherein it says that God has “set eternity in the hearts of men.”

moving toward something greater?

There are several passages in the New Testament which refer to an image or likeness in connection with what believers are becoming through the process of salvation. Romans 8:29 notes that believers are being conformed to the image of the Son: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren." Second Corinthians 3:18 speaks similarly, and both Eph. 4:23-24 and Col. 3:10 speak of a "new nature" which apparently is not referring to the pre-Fall state.

Christ is the image of God as indicated in 2 Cor. 4:4 and Col. 1:15. Together with Heb. 1:3 it may be seen that this involves the idea that the incarnate Christ is the visible manifestation of God. Since the believer is being conformed to the image of Christ who is the image of God; and since this is described in Col. 3:10 and Eph. 4:24 as being related to the areas of true righteousness, holiness and full-knowledge; and since 1 John 3:2-7 teaches that it is in the future that believers will be like him (glorified; that is, pure, without sin and righteous as he is), it appears that they will be in Christ more than what they would have been in Adam. In other words, the image of God as taught in Genesis is not the final word. Something greater is to be expected for believers. This being the case, evangelicals should not be inclined to lay a great deal of emphasis upon the image of God as originally found in Adam and Eve. Perhaps inclusivism does this.³⁰⁸

This is further attested when considering human ability to sin. Adam had the ability to sin or not to sin (Latin: *posse non peccare*), but in a glorified state, believers will no longer possess the ability to sin (Latin: *non posse peccare*). It appears that to be made into the image of Christ is far better than that image which originally existed in pre-Fall Adam.

This relates to the present debate concerning non-Christian religions in the following way. Given the image of God in humans, and given the fact that it has been affected by sin, there should be expected a great degree of diversity and creativity in world religions, while still maintaining some similarities between them. The image of God causes humans to seek some spiritual aspect to their lives and, given the constitution of humans as both material and non-material (or spiritual), this can be expected. God created humankind to desire fellowship with him in the spiritual realm. Atheism, then, is a classic portrayal of humanity against its very

³⁰⁸ For an article dealing in some respect with this issue, see Stanley Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Dec 2004) 617-628.

nature, and stands as an example of the stark reality that exists from the effects of sin.³⁰⁹

But the effects of the Fall are not only seen in atheism, but possibly in the variety of religions in the world as well. People have a propensity to create what they want to believe, and an even greater propensity to take that which is good and turn it into evil. According to many evangelicals, Satan may use this inclination in sinners for his own purposes. As he attempts to counterfeit God's truth, humans may also work alongside him, possibly creating their own false religions. Satan's lie in the Garden, "you will be like God," would not have worked if Adam and Eve did not believe it. It would seem remiss to not at least consider the possibility that in the religious realm, Satan is misleading humans, as he has attempted to do since the beginning.

The pluralist and inclusivist positions suffer from a faulty Hamartiology which does not take into account the fallenness of humans and their ability to warp the truth for their own purposes. As noted in the discussion of pagan saints, the pagan religion of people like Melchizedek, Abimelech, and Rahab were not the reason why these saints of old were drawn to God. If anything, those religions served as stumbling blocks to true faith. Rather, these holy pagans were "evangelised" much like people are today. Once they heard about the one, true God, they turned from their pagan religion and placed their faith in him.³¹⁰

The existence of a variety of world religions, then, does not necessarily serve as a reminder of God's desire to draw all people to himself. Rather, for evangelicals they may also serve as a reminder that Satan is at work in the world, counterfeiting the truth of God in order to deceive humankind, and that humanity is fallen and will itself devise ways to follow God which are human-made, sinful, and deceitful. The *imago Dei* causes people to seek a spiritual relationship, but the Fall ensures that such endeavours, apart from the work of God's Spirit, will only be warped and unacceptable. It is only when God's Spirit is at work overcoming the affects of the Fall that religion can be pure. As noted earlier, that work by the Spirit must correspond to God's Word, also a work of the same Spirit, with the name of Jesus as its focus.

³⁰⁹ It is for this reason that it must be concluded that the inclusivism found in the Vatican II notion of "holy atheist" is untenable, as noted earlier. Tord Fornberg goes in detail through the various Vatican II papers dealing with the statements about those outside Christianity in *The Problem of Christianity in Multi-Religious Societies of Today: The Bible in a World of Many Faiths* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995) 15-21.

³¹⁰ A specific study of the world's religions and each one's concept of sin, although beyond the scope of this present study, would be fascinating nonetheless. The Christian understanding of sin is vastly different than that found in religions which admit to such (eg., Islam), let alone with those religions which barely at all have any developed Hamartiology (eg., Buddhism, Hinduism).

3.5.3 An Evaluation of Inclusivism's Understanding of Prevenient Grace

Coupled with his view of general revelation and the religious sphere of humanity's culture as seen as a product of the *imago Dei*, Pinnock brings to bear his Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace. In *Wideness*, he asks why there exists the variety of religions in the world today. His first response, and rightly so, is a recognition of the image of God in humanity. "It is our nature, made in the image of God, to seek him" (102).³¹¹

The Arminian, and especially Wesleyan understanding, of prevenient grace is also brought into Pinnock's arguments. "World religions reflect to some degree general revelation and prevenient grace" (*Wideness*, 104). It is this prevenient grace that frees up sinners to respond to the offer of salvation from God (103).

The first concern involving this understanding of prevenient grace is if it is biblically founded. Interestingly, Pinnock himself recognises a weakness in this area. In recounting his theological pilgrimage from Calvinism to Wesleyan Arminianism, he makes this intriguing comment: "But I also knew that the Bible has no developed doctrine of universal prevenient grace, however convenient it would be for us if it did" (*Grace/Will*, 22). Yet he still manages to make it a major tenet of his position on general revelation and its salvific benefits. It appears that prevenient grace is a theological and not a biblical necessity in Pinnock's inclusivism.

However, there seems to be an even greater problem with the idea of universal, prevenient grace than the paucity of biblical support, and that is the theological problems. The idea of preparatory grace does not seem to do what Arminian inclusivists expect it to do. They posit that it frees an individual from the effects of sin, thus allowing that person to freely choose to follow God. Envisioned is the recapitulation that Christ underwent in which he brings humans back to a position of freedom.

But can prevenient grace as envisioned by Arminian inclusivists really be said to do this? Before his Fall, Adam was sinless and immortal. This can hardly be said to be the case for people today, even if prevenient grace is operative. Something more in line with Pelagius'

³¹¹ Pinnock graciously attempts as much as possible to grant a positive portrayal of the views of others, especially if they are adherents to non-Christian faiths. In this section, though, he makes a nod for atheists as well. "... Religions flow out of human aspiration, that is, from the center of our religious human nature. Here, atheists have a good point. If there were no God, there would still be religions. The need for God is so great within us that we would project gods even if none existed. God created humankind as naturally, inherently, and incurably religious. It is our nature, made in the image of God, to seek him" (102). Apparently, in bending over backward to compliment atheists, Pinnock has made a major error of reasoning. It does not stand to reason that if God did not exist, humanity would have created gods anyway. And it especially does not make sense to appeal to the image of God as a point for the atheist's position. If no god existed, there would be no image and no innate desire to seek God. Unfortunately, such weak reasoning by Pinnock on incidental points causes his major conclusions to appear suspect.

elimination of original sin and the negation of the effects of Adam's sin for all subsequent human beings would be necessary for true, individual freedom.

Also worth noting is that prevenient grace, although appearing on the surface to be a gentle, non-coercive force, actually works against human freedom. It was argued earlier in the Theology-proper section that the inclusivist desire to preserve human freedom is actually lost when God determines to forego the human decision to rebel in the Garden by sending his Son to undo the decision made by Adam. There is simply no way around it. If God wants to save fallen humanity, he must to some degree violate human freedom in order to do it. Prevenient grace, as understood by Arminian inclusivists, appears to be one way of doing that.

Prevenient grace appears to be a means by which the objectionable tenet of certain strains of Calvinism, limited atonement, can be eliminated. To Pinnock and his ilk, Calvinism in virtually any form is too limiting. In it God appears stingy with his grace. The Arminian understanding of prevenient grace, especially as found in John Wesley's teaching, makes the offer of salvation and its effectiveness much wider.

As noble as this goal may be, one wonders how biblically and theologically trustworthy it is. Pinnock consistently speaks negatively about the "fewness doctrine" that he perceives in traditional Calvinistic and evangelical Christianity. In fact, he notes that it encourages people toward pluralism, using John Hick's own comments in that respect as proof (*Wideness*, 17, 19, 186). He believes that God does not want to "rescue a few brands plucked from the burning" (23); thus inclusivism is far superior to exclusivism in its wider hope of salvation.

The difficulty with this position is that Scripture often does speak in terms of fewness. It was already noted the several teachings from Jesus in this regard and how inclusivists tend to avoid them or attempt to reinterpret them in less than satisfactory ways. But Scripture is replete with examples of fewness, such as Rahab and her household being saved while the entire city of Jericho was destroyed, or Noah and his family of eight while the remainder of humanity was lost. Peter uses the Great Flood as a pattern of eschatological judgment (1 Pet. 3:20-21; 2 Pet. 3:6-7).

In the early chapters of Genesis, the story of the arrogance of the entire population of Babel is juxtaposed with the faithfulness of one man, Abraham, and Enoch stands as a lone example of a truly godly man in the midst of generations which became increasingly evil and in need of universal judgment in the Flood. Elijah bemoans his solitary stance against Ahab and Jezebel, but is told that God has reserved 7000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). Yet 7000 is certainly a small percentage of the overall population of Israel at that time. Paul uses this as an example for his "remnant" teaching concerning Israel (Rom.

11:5). Even the election of Israel as God's chosen people is seen as a fewness in light of the hundreds of other nations which existed at that time.³¹² As objectionable as the "fewness doctrine" may appear to inclusivists, it is not for want of biblical support.

The idea of fewness is also attacked based on the notion of geographical and chronological "accidents." Often the argument is used by pluralists and inclusivists that one's place of birth, and hence one's religious affiliation, are "accidents" of history. In other words, if a person is born in the Middle East, chances are very good that that person will become a Muslim; if in Asia, a Buddhist; if in India, Hindu; if in Europe, Christian, and so on. It is then reasoned that such "accidents" are not the fault of the people in question and as such, God would not hold it against them.³¹³

This topic is particularly breeched when speaking about Christian missions and whether or not a person needs to consciously acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour before that person can be saved. The argument usually follows that God would not be so mean or callous as to hold such accidents of history against people. If they have not heard about Jesus, through no fault of their own, how then can God hold it against them if they have not confessed Jesus as Lord? Reason and sheer fairness dictate he cannot do so.

Pinnock speaks of "accidents of time and geography" (*Four Views*, 255; also 116), as does pluralist John Hick when he speaks about the "luck" of being born in a Christian part of the world (250). Inclusivists believe that salvation *must be* universally accessible regardless of limits of geography and time (24).

At what point, though, must arguments concerning God's grace be brought to the fore? If *grace* is desired, is this not speaking of things which are undeserved? Inclusivists rightly speak of God's grace, but to then conclude that sinful humans *deserve* access to this grace undermines the entire understanding of grace itself.

Even further, can they truly appeal to "accidents" of birthplace? Is a Chinese woman born in the fifteenth century "accidentally" born there, as if God has no control over the matter? When God revealed himself specially to the Israelites, were the Babylonians just unfortunate that they did not receive equal treatment? Or is God not sovereign in the movements of peoples?

³¹² Paul can say, "Not all Israel is Israel" (Rom. 9:6) which further hints that even among God's chosen nation, there was a remnant or a fewness to the number being saved.

³¹³ This is the question tackled in the book, *Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard*, (Crockett and Sigountos, eds., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991) and is also expressed explicitly in the chapter written by David Clark (35).

In Paul's speech to the Athenians, he appears to not subscribe to this accidental notion of people and their historical placement. "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26). Some evangelicals rightly question the inclusivist and pluralist contention that people are accidents of geography and time in light of this very specific statement by Paul to the contrary. A recent Reformed scholar makes an observation which may bear some light on this topic:

"We will not expand here upon the question of how people in remote portions of the world got there in the first place. We simply observe that, if biblical history is correct, the migration to a pocket of the world beyond contact with outside civilization originally would have had to involve a conscientious rebellion against Yahweh by the ancestors of persons in that "unreached" pocket now (Genesis 11). That being the case, these rebellious ancestors' progeny being beyond the reach of – let us be candid – truly vast missions efforts to get to them could be a manifestation of the very sort of judgment God has warned human beings about in his Word (Exod. 20:4-5)."³¹⁴

In short, the reasons why inclusivists posit the need for prevenient grace do not stand up to close scrutiny, nor is prevenient grace able to do what inclusivists propose that it does.

3.5.4 Pelagian Leanings?

There is one further hesitation when it comes to the Hamartiology of inclusivism. At what point will inclusivists discard the notion of original sin and embrace Pelagianism? Is it not a logical next step given their understanding of fairness and God's love?

This is no idle speculation either. Pinnock hints at such things in his discussion about humans and the image of God, when he breaches the topic of death. There he suggests that a "new way of thinking" is necessary for evangelicals, one which views death as something always existing. "It suggests that Adam, had he not sinned, would still have reached the end of life" (*Flame*, 72). This apparently harmless statement should send up warning signs for those familiar with the views of Pelagius. He believed that death was a natural attribute of human nature, not something that only came after the Fall. In other words, death was not the result of sin.

³¹⁴ R. Todd Mangum, "Is There a Reformed Way to Get the Benefits of the Atonement to 'Those Who Have Never Heard?'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (March 2004) 126, n. 13.

Pinnock's leanings toward Eastern Orthodox thought on the matter of sin are also cause for alarm, since Orthodoxy has adopted the Pelagian understanding that humans are not born sinners (*Flame*, 159-160). And Pinnock opposes Augustine's formulations against Pelagius concerning the effects of sin.

The idea that it is not fair that God would judge people who have not heard the message of Jesus appears to support the notion that people have an intrinsic right to salvation. The idea that sinners can, through their good works, somehow be seen as pleasing to God and worthy of salvation, also smacks of Pelagianism. However, these matters are better dealt with in the next section on Soteriology.³¹⁵

3.5.5 Conclusion to Hamartiological Evaluation

As has been the tendency when looking at their doctrine of Scripture and their doctrine of God, here too inclusivists have moved away from a typical evangelical doctrine of sin. There are troubling indicators in the positive view of non-Christian religions found in the theology of Pinnock.

Consider these two competing statements from evangelicals today:

"We recognize that all men have some knowledge of God through general revelation in nature. But we deny that this can save, for men suppress the truth by their unrighteousness."³¹⁶

"The religions of man are not the artistry of demonic beings or the corrupted projections of man's natural bent for philosophizing."³¹⁷

The first statement is a typical evangelical approach to general revelation and why it is not salvific. Human depravity has made the clear voice of general revelation muddled. For this reason, it speaks against humankind as seen in Paul's eloquent argument in the opening chapters of Romans.

The second statement is more in line with pluralist and inclusivist leanings. The various world religions serve as examples not of fallen humanity or demonic activity, but of the image of God and God's prevenient grace. As such, these non-Christian religions should be embraced to some degree.

³¹⁵ Others have recognised these Pelagian leanings, eg., Nash, 1994:134, 139, 170, and Sanders, *No Other Name*, 265, who notes it as well even though he is an inclusivist.

³¹⁶ Lausanne Covenant, as quoted in Meiring, 56.

³¹⁷ Thomas O'Meara, "Toward a Subjective Theology of Revelation," *Theological Studies* 36 (Summer, 1975) 421 (quoted in Demarest, 18).

Exclusivists have rightly opposed this inclusivist understanding. In terms of Hamartiology, it does not properly take into consideration the biblical data concerning the fallenness of humanity. Pinnock seems ready to use the universality of religion to bolster his point, but he appears to disregard the universality of sin as a point against his inclusivism.

Inclusivists take too positive a position on non-Christian religions, and although in principle they speak against a Catholic inclusivism which views these religions as salvific, it is difficult to discern little difference in their own view in this regard. The editors of *Four Views* note that inclusivists, in attempting to walk the precarious edge between exclusivism's rejection of non-Christian religions as false without adopting pluralism's view of all religions as salvific, have taken up an apparently impossible task. "If every culture is distinctively religious at its core, can Pinnock escape the implication that other religions are salvific?" (25). It does not appear so.

The question is not whether knowledge of God innately exists in humans, but to what extent that knowledge can truly be known in a salvific manner. Suppression of the truth and active rebellion is endemic to the entire human race. It is a universal problem unlimited in scope and application. The existence of the religions of the world do not serve as a positive marker for prevenient grace, the salvific benefits of general revelation, and the *imago Dei*, but as a negative sign that fallen humanity is still devising ways of turning from the one, true God and his only means of salvation, his Son Jesus. Rightly so, exclusivists are more inclined toward a Calvinist understanding of human depravity. "Why do we presume so much on ability of human nature? It is wounded, battered, troubled, lost. What we need is true confession, not false defense" (Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.11).

In Paul's difficult discussion in chapters 9-11 of Romans, he laments the decision of his Jewish compatriots to not place their faith in Christ. However, he recognises their zeal for God. Obviously, this is a zeal for the one, true God, not a zeal misplaced in some false deity. But Paul also recognises that their zeal is misplaced nonetheless. "I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge" (10:2).

His hope is that Israel would be saved (10:1). This strongly implies that in his mind, they are currently not saved. This sentiment echoes what Paul says elsewhere about his own spiritual situation before he came to faith in Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:8). Evangelicals should strongly protest those inclusivists who believe that, before coming to faith in Christ, Paul's zeal for God would have saved him anyway. If this is the position of the Jews, the ones whom Paul can describe in such powerful language - "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.

Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ” (9:4b-5) - what can be said about those of other faiths? Clearly the God Jesus worshiped is the God of Christianity, but evangelicals dare not rashly conclude that the gods worshiped in other religions are equal.

What is the remedy for Paul’s Jewish brethren? It is none other than confession of the name of Jesus. “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (10:9). But what should evangelicals make of the adherents of other religions, those moral followers whom Pinnock and other inclusivists believe have godly faith, yet who do not know Jesus? Can evangelicals be as positive about their fate as inclusivists want them to be? Paul continues to say that true faith comes from “the word of Christ” (10:17), not by some other means.

Inclusivism suffers from a faulty Hamartiology, which in turn drives it to faulty soteriological conclusions. Evangelicals should not be inclined to accept their positive portrayal of general revelation, especially as it relates to non-Christian religions, nor should they find their arguments concerning the *imago Dei* and prevenient grace compelling. Perhaps Scripture often speaks of a “remnant” with good reason, because it recognises the universal plight of humanity under sin, and does not allow for such positive hopes for those who are outside of faith in Jesus Christ. The wider hope of inclusivism appears misplaced.

3.6 What Is the Fate of the Unevangelised?

A Soteriological Reflection on Judgment

The point has come in this dissertation where some substantive summaries of the inclusivist teaching concerning the fate of the unevangelized can be made.

For centuries a question on the hearts and minds of many Christians was, “What happens to people who die never hearing the gospel or even the name of Jesus?” Picture an eleventh-century Mongolian who dies and is standing before God. God asks this person, “Did you place your faith in my son, Jesus Christ?” And the Mongolian politely answers, “Jesus who?” This scenario has plagued many Christians through the years because Christianity has been strongly of the “exclusivist” variety. Certainly, there have been some voices here and there for whom the question was not as problematic, but they have been an occasional gull chirping in the roaring sea of exclusivism. That tide, however, has changed. What used to be only a

small trickle of voices against the flow of exclusivism has now, according to some, become a deafening torrent.³¹⁸ Now the shore is full of chirping gulls.

While working in the United States in the late 1980s, my business took me to British Columbia, Canada, and specifically Vancouver. This eclectic city has the full range of religious adherents. My taxi driver from the airport to my hotel wore a turban, and so I asked him why. He was a Sikh he explained, and for the next twenty-five minutes we discussed religion. I told him my views about Jesus Christ and he told me his beliefs.

Upon dropping me off at the hotel, he got out of the taxi to retrieve my luggage from the boot, and then told me these words. “Life is like a river. Some people come to the river to wash their clothes, some come to water their cattle, and others come to bathe. All of them come for different reasons, but they all come to the same river. The same is true about God. Don’t let anyone tell you there is only one way.” And with that, he got back in his taxi and left. He had obviously heard little that I had said during the drive, since I was telling him the entire time that Jesus Christ is the only way.

This “all roads lead to heaven” mentality is growing in what traditionally have been Christian or Christianised nations throughout the world. People are all finding their own way, as it were, with the ultimate hope that this way leads to God. In fact, the growing notion is that indeed all roads do lead to God, no matter how different or diverse or internally contradictory or inconsistent these roads may be. It is why Carl Braaten can say, “To continue to be christocentric today is about as anachronistic as to believe that the earth is flat.”³¹⁹

As noted in the Introduction, this brand of pluralism is gaining popularity in the Western world. It is a pluralism that inclusivists such as Clark Pinnock are adamantly opposed to, yet there are similarities nonetheless between many of the methodologies and conclusions of inclusivism and pluralism.

A simple survey of some of the Christian books produced in just the last two decades on this topic shows how hot this issue is. *Jesus, a Savior or the Savior?*, *More than One Way?*, *No Other Name?* and *Through No Fault of Their Own?* are all titles which ask a question, and at the heart lies the ultimate question of Christianity, “How can you really believe that Jesus is the *only* way for salvation?” Such a view is intolerant and exclusivistic and as such does not foster dialogue between the religions. As already noted, Sanders identifies the question,

³¹⁸ “Exclusivism strikes more and more Christians as immoral.” (Wilfred Cantwell Smith in Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, (eds.) *Christ’s Lordship and Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981) 202.

³¹⁹ *No Other Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 66.

“What happens to people who have never heard the Gospel?” as “far and away . . . the most-asked apologetic question on United States college campuses.”³²⁰

Most books on this topic naturally deal with the fate of those who do not hear the gospel, but the matter by no means ends there. The only reason why evangelicals are concerned with the fate of the ones who do not hear about Jesus is because for them, Jesus is the only Saviour. However, for many others, this issue is a non-issue. For the universalist, for example, a person can hear about Jesus, reject him, and still obtain eternal life. The fate of those who do not hear is a relatively easy matter to handle for the universalist, since it really does not matter whether a person hears or not, or even believes or not.

The fate of all humanity is the real issue, not simply the fate of those who have not heard about Jesus or who have faith in some other “god” or mediator other than the biblical one. ‘What will happen to humanity?’ is the ultimate question.

As already noted, four main views vie for the right to answer this question. Three of them – universalism, pluralism, and inclusivism – concentrate on the love of God and his desire that all people be saved, while only one, exclusivism, seems to take the “dark side” of God’s nature seriously, namely, that he is also Righteous Judge as well as Loving Father. As was seen through the study of the teaching of Jesus, scholars from the first three groups should not be allowed to just speak about the love of Jesus without looking at his judgment, a topic that takes up a considerable amount of the entire teaching of Jesus.

As some of the soteriological implications of inclusivism are considered, three distinct areas will be addressed: their view of hell, their disdain for the “fewness doctrine,” and how these can potentially affect Christian world missions.

3.6.1 Taking the Hell out of Hell³²¹

It is not within the scope of this dissertation to go into a full-blown debate over the traditional view of hell and the various options chosen by some inclusivists which contradict this view. Rather, the reasons why inclusivists opt for one of the alternatives will be considered to see if their reasons are tenable.

For example, Pinnock consistently refers to the “Father of Jesus” in his argumentation against the traditional view of hell as eternal, conscious torment.³²² This “sadistic” view of

³²⁰ Sanders, *Three Views*, 7.

³²¹ This phrase is taken from Pinnock’s rebuttal of the metaphorical view of hell (*Four Views on Hell*, 87).

³²² He uses it at least half a dozen times in his chapter devoted to the topic in *Four Views on Hell*.

God cannot be maintained. Rather, annihilationism³²³ accords more closely to the nature of the Father claims Pinnock. But why? Would it not be better to say that universalism accords more closely to “God is love” than does annihilationism? Wiping out people from existence does not appear to be the most loving thing to do. Forgiving all of them without regard for what they did, that appears much more loving.

In fact, as the two main prongs of the inclusivist system are evaluated – the love of God and the freedom for humanity to choose – it is here that one presupposition gains prominence over the other, and it is not what might have first been expected. “God is love” takes a backseat to human freedom in this argument at least. Given the inclusivist understanding of God as love, it would appear that the more loving thing to do would be to grant salvation to as many people as possible. This is in fact one of the objections used by inclusivists against exclusivism. A “wider hope” accords much better with the biblical picture of the Father of Jesus, so say the inclusivists, than the “fewness doctrine” of traditional evangelicalism.

Why, then, does this not apply to universalism when comparing it with inclusivism? The reason is immediately obvious, because in universalism, human freedom is compromised. The controlling element of inclusivism, then, is human freedom, a most curious turn of events, since Pinnock especially has consistently thumped liberalism for its views on human autonomy. Apparently all things must succumb to the non-negotiable of human freedom, even when the love of God is at stake.

Another difficulty for annihilationism is that the very earliest Christians believed in the traditional view of hell. Pinnock attempts to somehow attach this to the Hellenisation of Christianity, something he does frequently when a doctrine appears that he is unwilling to accept. In fact, he has used this argument so often that it has lost any credibility. Time and time again he lays the blame either on a pagan influence on early Christian thought (such as with classical theism) or squarely at the feet of one individual, almost always Augustine or someone with Calvinist leanings. The thought that the view he is opposing was widely held because it may actually have some biblical merit appears to escape his thinking.³²⁴

Yet, Pinnock and other inclusivists are faced with the historical fact that annihilationism just was not taught in the early centuries of Christianity. This historical paucity of support is considerable and should cause evangelicals to pause before adopting the inclusivist

³²³ Interested readers are referred to Blanchard’s excellent treatment of annihilationism, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Durham, NC: Evangelical Press, 1993) 209-249. Many inclusivists opt for this position.

³²⁴ Virtually every historical example that Pinnock chooses who believed in the traditional view of hell was a Calvinist. But surely there are countless Arminians who also held to the traditional view? Why does Pinnock not cite some of them as well? At times, Pinnock is so rabidly anti-Calvinist that it appears to cloud his judgment.

understanding of the fate of unbelievers. Outside the New Testament and the first century, besides Origen one is hard-pressed to find any Christian theologian in the first several *centuries* who denied the literal understanding of hell (and Origen did not adopt annihilationism, but rather a form of universalism). Are the relatively new formulations for hell not more a product of a modern-day milieu and cultural love-affair with tolerance than the result of serious scrutiny of the teaching of Jesus?³²⁵

Annihilationism may be spun as a horrible punishment by inclusivists, but is it really? Does it not blunt the full force of the biblical picture of God's judgment? Does the traditional view not accord better with the biblical bleakness? "To be rejected by God, to miss the purpose for which one was created, to pass into oblivion while others enter into bliss, to enter nonbeing – this will mean weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Pinnock, *Four Views on Hell*, 165). But can it truly be said that an unconscious being will experience such weeping and gnashing? If annihilationism were correct, would the biblical language not better be written as "everlasting non-existence" than "everlasting torment?"

Pinnock believes that the traditional view allows for a cosmic dualism and a "lurking sense of metaphysical disquiet" (154). In other words, a hell of eternal, conscious torment will stand alongside heavenly bliss. Will this not be a blot on the universe? But this is not a proper understanding of the traditional view of hell. Traditionally, hell is believed to be an eternal reminder of the justice and judgment of God. In this way, such a place will actually bring him glory, not shame.³²⁶ It is not a place where at least Satan reigns as Pinnock states (154), but a place where Satan is also eternally punished.

Non-existence actually appears to be a better option for rebellious sinners. Once they cease to exist, who really cares if they do not enjoy the bliss of heaven and the purpose for which they were created? Because they do not exist, they will not know any better. Annihilationism allows sinners to thumb their nose at God and in some sense, to get away with it.³²⁷

Pinnock's view of hell is "oriented to human freedom" (151) and this is the key point. The traditional view of hell must be discarded not because it does not fit properly with the biblical data, but because it does not accord with the Arminian preconceptions Pinnock has

³²⁵ Ajith Fernando develops the idea of hell as culturally unacceptable in the West, influenced by pluralism, the human potential movement, the "feel good" generation, and the growth of eastern religious thinking (*Crucial Questions About Hell*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991) 22-23.

³²⁶ Therefore, when Pinnock says that "eternal torment serves no purpose at all" (153), it is understandable that many evangelicals disagree.

³²⁷ Walvoord sees a connection between holding to annihilationism and rejecting biblical inerrancy (*Four Views on Hell*, 167-168).

concerning human freedom. The numerous warnings found in Scripture concerning hell and God's judgment are effectively meaningless if hell is actually a place of one's own choosing, somewhere a person would rather be than under the rule of God, as inclusivists contend.³²⁸

In short, it does not stand to reason that annihilationism accords better with God as love, nor does it maintain human freedom in the strictest sense of that term. Just as much as Pinnock can assume that in a universalist understanding there must be some people who did not want to be saved, the same applies to annihilationism. Surely there will be some people who did not want to cease to exist, yet God violated their will anyway.³²⁹

3.6.2 Missiological Considerations

The possible implications for Christian missions cannot be ignored. Pinnock believes that mission agencies will be among those most opposed to annihilationism, because then they will lose their "huge stick" in promoting their cause (*Four Views on Hell*, 164; also 39). This revision in the traditional view of hell is therefore needed by evangelicals, along with a broadening of "the evangelical view of other religions" (164, n. 60). He even posits that if Christians do not adopt annihilationism, in time the Christian concept of hell will vanish (137). Ironically, Pinnock is suggesting that by adopting the view that hell really does not exist, Christians will save the existence of the doctrine of hell! The bottom line is still the same. The traditional view of hell must be discarded, "dumped in the name of credible doctrine," says Pinnock (163). Again, the issue of judgment must somehow be tinkered with by inclusivists.

How does this affect evangelical missions? If annihilationism is the only consideration, inclusivists may have a point that it does not detract from missions as much as exclusivists fear. But can they honestly state that it encourages missions? Probably not. If given two options, everlasting, conscious punishment where your skin is burned non-stop for all eternity, and non-existence, which would you choose? The choice seems fairly obvious. No one

³²⁸ One difficulty with considering all references to hell as figurative is that Jesus also speaks of heaven, sometimes in the same sentence. To have him speak of hell and heaven in the same sentence or passage, yet to be considering one to be figurative and the other literal, is not exegetically consistent or accurate. This is expressed quite succinctly in the words of a nineteenth-century theologian: "We must either admit the endless misery of Hell, or give up the endless happiness of Heaven" (Moses Stuart, *Exegetical Essays on Several Words Relating to Future Punishment* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publication Committee, 1867) 62.

³²⁹ And what of the biblical passages which hint at degrees of hell? Pinnock actually finds the Catholic idea of Purgatory enticing on this score (*Four Views on Hell*, 127-131). Hendrikus Berkhof sounds a similar tone when he speaks of hell as a form of purification. "God is serious about the responsibility of our decision, but he is even more serious about the responsibility of his love. The darkness of rejection and God-forsakenness cannot and may not be argued away, but no more can and may it be eternalized. For God's sake we hope that hell will be a form of purification," *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979) 532. However, Berkhof's plea sounds more like wishful thinking than anything else.

would think that non-existence is worse than eternal torment. Annihilationism may indeed be right, but it can hardly be said to encourage missions more than the traditional view of hell.

However, the main issue concerning missions more generally concerns inclusivism itself. If inclusivists truly believe that non-Christian religions draw people to God, that the content of general revelation is salvific (because all revelation from God is, according to inclusivists), and that God offers salvation to all people and judges them on the “light” they have received, regardless of whether or not they hear about Jesus, do they really need missions? Loraine Boettner’s comment is instructive here:

“The belief that the heathens without the Gospel are lost has been one of the strongest arguments in favor of foreign missions. If we believe that their own religions contain enough light and truth to save them, the importance of preaching the Gospel to them is greatly lessened. Our attitude toward foreign missions is determined pretty largely by the answer which we give to this question.”³³⁰

Often, the inclusivist answer concerning the importance of missions is found in the notion that Christian missionaries are not so much telling the unreached about God as they are giving them a fuller understanding of him. However, this idea of “full-strength salvation” reveals a deeper problem with inclusivism. It is not that missionaries are bringing salvation, because the people they are bringing the gospel to are already saved. Given earlier comments made by inclusivists about the pre-conversion status of Saul of Tarsus and Cornelius, this observation is entirely justified. It leaves one wondering what exactly the difference is between evangelical inclusivism and the Catholic variety, or inclusivism and pluralism in general. Despite the many objections Pinnock and others have made that they do not subscribe to pluralism (or the inclusivism of Rahner, for example), their conclusions are nonetheless virtually identical.

How are these adherents of other faiths justified if not by faith in Jesus? Apparently via their good works. As already seen the Parable of the Sheep and Goats is used by inclusivists to hint at the possibility that people can be saved by what they do. This Pinnock calls the ‘ethical criteria’ that God will use to determine who should be saved. When even an atheist can be saved in this way, it appears that many inclusivists are less evangelical than they state.

It is here that Ronald Nash finds a “drift toward Pelagianism” in inclusivism (1994:170). As noted in the hamartiological section, this is not an idle concern. At least in the inclusivism

³³⁰ *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948) 119.

of Pinnock, there are strong hints of Pelagian thought, such as the idea that death is intrinsic to human nature and not the result of the Fall, and that the doctrine of original or inherited sin may not be correct. Is Pinnock so anti-Augustine that he finds himself leaning more and more toward Pelagius? When the above concerns are coupled with the current observation that inclusivism basically espouses salvation by good works, fears of liberalism are even increased. One's Soteriology is always driven by one's Hamartiology. A doctrine of sin that is less than evangelical will yield a doctrine of salvation that is equally beneath evangelicalism's. Missions no longer involves bringing people into God's kingdom, because they are already there before the gospel even reaches them. There is only a hair's breadth of a difference here between inclusivism and pluralism.

In fact, the missionary endeavour may very well be discarded on pragmatic grounds. If a person of another faith is already saved, then bringing the message of Jesus may even result in bad consequences. What if this person then makes a conscious choice to reject Jesus? Has this person now moved from being saved to being lost? Recall, Pinnock opted to take an agnostic view on this important question, which appears to skirt the issue entirely. Sharing the gospel with someone already in a state of salvation via a non-Christian faith could potentially have disastrous effects.

Concerning the matter of dialogue, evangelicals can agree with Pinnock when he says that dialogue cannot sacrifice truth, yet the need for dialogue is a bit unclear in an inclusivist system. With exclusivism, there is a clear need. In the presence of potential judgment, dialogue is necessary. With pluralism, inclusivists rightly note that dialogue is not really needed, since neither side lacks any truth.

But with inclusivism, one gets the sense that they are being secretly arrogant. They believe that Jesus is the only Saviour, yet claim to be open to dialogue. About what exactly? Is inclusivism in a middle ground where neither the truth claims of exclusivism nor the relativism of pluralism are operative? Put another way, if someone has nothing new to offer, where is the need for dialogue?

The inclusivist counters that there is something new to offer, a relationship with Jesus as the only Son of God. But as has already been established, there really is no need for this. It is not as if we are dealing with a man dying of thirst in the desert. In that case, the exclusivist takes him water and saves him from death. In the pluralist scenario, there really are no people dying in the desert. So what is it in the inclusivist system? Is there a man dying in the desert

who only has a glass of water, and someone brings him a bucketful?³³¹ Is this truly the New Testament ethos of missions, giving someone a little more of what they already possess?

One need look no further than to the evangelistic zeal found in the New Testament and early Church. The Apostle Paul, for instance, has numerous “universalistic” passages in his writings as already seen. However, to understand what the man meant by his writings, one must look at what the man did with his life. If Paul truly believed that “all roads lead to heaven” or that, so long as one sincerely followed his religious convictions, that person would be approved by God no matter what his belief system, would Paul have strived so desperately to spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire?

This question becomes all the more poignant when one considers the great persecution Paul endured to carry out this very task. “What happens to people who have not heard the gospel?” may be easier to answer than at first thought, at least from the perspective of Paul. If Paul’s answer were, “Well, they go to heaven because there are several ways to get there, and every religion has enough good in it to warrant the approval of God,” then Paul should be considered a madman for striving so dreadfully to take the message of Christ to people who would attain salvation anyway without hearing such a message. It seems more preferable to consider Paul to be an exclusivist in the sense defined in this study. According to Paul, there could be no other way than through the “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (I Tim. 2:5).

But could it not be concluded that Paul believed Jesus to be the sole mediator, yet he still could hold a certain level of “common grace” to exist in the other religions, much as Pinnock believes? Or could an appeal be made to Paul’s views concerning “general revelation” as a sufficient ground for people to come to God, regardless of whether or not they heard about the message of Christ’s atonement? Both questions can be answered in the same way.

Arguably the religion closest in kinship to the teaching of Jesus would be Judaism. Paul maintained a positive view of his people and their heritage despite his conversion, and he held out great hope for their eventual acknowledgment of Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah.³³² Still, Paul believed his brothers to be lost, separated from the grace of God by reason of their

³³¹ Sanders uses the analogy of people who live on dirty drinking water. They may suffer from diarrhea and dehydration, but they can still live in such circumstances. Whereas bringing the gospel to such people is like bringing clean, drinkable water (*Destiny of the Unevangelized*, 54). Of course, this is an entirely unacceptable and even offensive analogy to make from a pluralist perspective, but it certainly does not communicate well an inclusivist understanding of the “richness” found in non-Christian religions that inclusivism attempts to portray.

³³² “Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ...” (Rom. 9:4b-5a). Note that Paul is speaking in the present tense; these blessings had not been lost or nullified despite the rejection of the Messiah by the Jews. Such things could not be said about any other religion.

rejection of God's chosen Messiah. If Judaism were judged by Paul to have fallen short, how can inclusivists possibly conclude that Paul believed the other religions to have greater influence?

As for the matter of general revelation, much has been made of Paul's early chapters of Romans and his appeal to creation and conscience. However, does Paul really make an appeal for the salvific effect of creation and conscience, or rather their condemning aspect when it comes to individuals and their salvation? As already argued in detail, he speaks of their ability to condemn sinners, never to save them.³³³ It is far more consistent to conclude that Paul believed there to be no other hope of salvation for people outside of their knowledge and trust in the atoning work of Jesus Christ (and his discussion in Romans 10:13-15 strongly suggests that people will be lost if they do not hear the gospel).

Much the same can be said for the other apostles, most of whom went to their death for the message of hope in Jesus. The first several centuries of the history of the Church (before Constantine) is further proof of a strong exclusivism in their beliefs. In the face of persecutions such as those under emperors Domitian, Decius, and the "Great Persecution" of Diocletian, as well as smaller, localised persecutions such as under Nero or Marcus Aurelius, the early Christians refused to buckle. Is this the behaviour of people who believed there are many ways to God, or who believed that other religions offer acceptable worship to the Creator?

Is it not more plausible that modern theologians and scholars, faced with an increasingly pluralistic society and worldview, are apt to read Scripture through their pluralist-coloured glasses and ignore facts that contradict their worldview, than to conclude that the New Testament authors and the early church did not understand fully what modern theologians are so quick to say they understand, namely, the effect of the atoning work of Christ?

Many inclusivists claim that there is much that Christians can learn from other religions. But what exactly? Do Christians lack a certain ethical awareness that followers of other faiths have? Evangelicals would have to be shown this. The biblical ethic founded in the lordship of Christ lacks nothing when it comes to concern for godly things, philanthropic love for fellow humans, and caring for the creation God has given humanity to maintain. If it is said that other religions can teach Christians something of value, what precisely is it then that the Scriptures lack?

³³³ Netland notes in *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* that despite the fact that people will be held accountable for the light they have received, no one lives or completely follows the light they have received. Hence, no one can be saved by this light (Leicester: Apollos, 1991) 266.

McDermott provides four reasons why Christians should interact with other faiths in the hope of learning (2000:216-219). The first is to become more sensitive evangelists, recognising that non-Christian faiths are not demonic or entirely false. Then evangelicals can share the gospel with more respect and sensitivity. This is a noble goal, but if other faiths already have truth-bearing revelation from God, what business do Christians have of sharing the gospel with them? For all the talk inclusivists use about the imperialistic attitude of exclusivists, there appears little difference in their understanding. “We inclusivists have the *full* truth, and you need to hear it.” Whether the missionary admits to little or no truth in the other religious tradition is of little practical consequence.

McDermott’s second reason is that evangelicals can become better disciples. He speaks of his reading Taoist and Buddhist works and how that has opened up for him a better understanding of mystery. This implies that the Christian Scriptures are inadequate in this area. If an evangelical can actually learn from the holy writings of other religions, that implies that these things cannot equally be learned from the Christian Scriptures. This is a most curious position for an evangelical to take, especially in light of 2 Tim. 3:15-17.

The third reason is to enhance “ecumenical social action” (218). This appears to be well-placed, so long as the goals are the same. If the views on social action themselves are polar opposites (eg., the western view of women and their rights versus those found in many Arab lands), such “ecumenical” action will not materialise. In essence, then, there really is nothing to learn here from other faiths, only that Christians and non-Christians should work together on shared social concerns.

The last reason is doxological. “The God of most evangelicals has been too small” (219). McDermott states that once Christians recognise that God has revealed truths to other adherents of other religions, they will come to praise him better. But this is circular reasoning. It is not self-evident that non-Christian faiths either come from God or are God-honouring. The earlier discussion on the biblical material concerning other faiths bears this out, and the faulty way in which inclusivists utilise the biblical category of “pagan saints” leads them to wrong conclusions. In short, God the Father cannot be honoured by religious traditions which do not honour Jesus his Son.³³⁴

³³⁴ In his comparison of the Christian understanding of God with that of Islam, Timothy George makes this insightful observation about the matter of the resurrection of Jesus: “There can be no Christianity without this event. There can be no Islam with it,” in *Is the Father of Jesus the God of Muhammad?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) 97. This just serves to illustrate that the contradictions which exist between Christianity and the non-Christian faiths are so extreme, that it would be disingenuous to suggest that all religions basically teach the same thing (pluralism) or that Christian missions is really going to people who already know the truth of God and are saved regardless of whether or not they hear the gospel (inclusivism). Harold Netland spends

3.6.3 God's Grace and the Fewness Doctrine

The last area of consideration is what Pinnock has called the “fewness doctrine.” As already seen, Pinnock as well as other inclusivists often appeal to sheer numbers in their argumentation that inclusivism more properly displays God's love than exclusivism. But a sword this sharp can cut both ways. Consider this statement:

“What kind of God would send *large numbers* of men, women, and children to hell without the remotest chance of responding to his truth? This does not sound like the God whom Jesus called Father” (Pinnock, *Wideness*, 154, emphasis added).

It seems that Pinnock's objection stems largely from the fact that he sees exclusivism as teaching “large numbers” of the lost. What, though, would he say if only a small percentage of humanity were lost? Would this sound more like the God whom Jesus called Father?

Relative numbers are meaningless. If God were to determine to save only one person from all of humanity, that would make him as gracious as if he had chosen to save one million. Because God is not obligated to save anyone, even the salvation of one individual would display his grace.

During the time of Noah, was God gracious? He only chose to preserve eight people from all of humanity. Was this not gracious? The universalist claims that God cannot be considered gracious unless he saves everybody, and the pluralist comes very close to the same thing. Even the inclusivist defines God's graciousness as being reflected in a vast majority of individuals being saved. But this only serves to place an external influence on the determination of God's nature. In other words, God's character cannot be defined by the relative numbers of people who live or perish. God's character is determined in and of itself. No external constraints or measures can exist which somehow define or determine his nature.

All of this is to say that God is gracious. Why? Because he is gracious. Because he has exercised his grace upon humanity. Must he exercise it upon all of humanity in order to be gracious? No, God is free to do what he chooses to do, and his character is determined by who he is. Certainly, he will always act according to his character and nature, but external

considerable space dealing with the very issue of “conflicting truth claims” among religious traditions in *Dissonant Voices* and he concludes, “The common assumption that all religions are ultimately teaching the same things in their own culturally conditioned ways is *prima facie* untenable,” 111. However, consider pluralist Wilfred Cantwell Smith's contention that no such contradictions exist, in John Hick (ed.), *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship between the World's Religions* (London: Sheldon, 1974) 156-162. He was so adamant about his point-of-view that he insisted the editor allow him an addendum to the book voicing his opinion that “conflicting truth claims” is a misnomer.

factor such as the relative number of humans saved cannot be taken as a measure or plumb line for God's character.

But does this beg the question, someone may ask. Would God be proven to be more gracious or more merciful if he chose to save the majority of humanity, as opposed to allowing the vast majority to perish? Exclusivists would respond that gracious is gracious. It would be an error to attempt to quantify grace.

Suppose five men break into my home and attempt to steal my possessions. I catch the men and am able to detain them until the police arrive. However, I decide to allow two of them to go free, while I detain the other three. Further, I tell one of the remaining three men that he may work in my garden for the next several weeks and I will accept that as payment for his attempted thievery, and then I will not report him to the police. The other two men, though, are turned over to the police as soon as they arrive.

Have I been gracious to any of the robbers? To the one who I have allowed to work in my garden, one could say that I have been gracious. However, all that man is doing is working to pay the penalty. In other words, the man ultimately goes free because of his own merit. There is really no grace exercised here. Someone may object to this, though, and say, "But by reason of the fact that you allowed the man to pay back his debt, you have shown the man grace." I disagree. I set the man free because of the merit he has achieved in working in my garden. Merit and grace are antithetical. Either he earns his freedom or he does not. If he earns it by working in my garden, he is set free on the basis of his own merit. The penalty has been paid. No grace is exercised on my part.

The two men that I turned over to the police were shown no grace. They attempted to steal from me, and I turned them over to the authorities to be punished. However, the two men I automatically let go have been shown unmerited favour, in other words, grace. They did not deserve to be set free. They were caught committing a crime and deserved to be turned over to the authorities, but I let them go. Their freedom from punishment has absolutely nothing to do with them.

Because grace by definition means unmerited favour, or the giving of something undeserved, if I choose to show grace to one of the thieves I can be called gracious. It is the fact that none of the thieves deserves grace that makes my act of freeing two of the men gracious. Had I turned all five over to the police, I certainly could not have been called gracious. But whether I allow one, two, three, four, or all five of them free from arrest, I can be deemed gracious. There is no "more gracious" or "less gracious." I am either gracious or I am not.

The same applies to God. He is by his very nature a gracious God, but it would be an error to attempt to quantify that attribute. Still, someone might object and say, “But really, if you allowed four of the five thieves to be set free from arrest, instead of just two, you would be shown to be more gracious would you not?” But if such reasoning is used when it comes to the character of God, a trap is created. Someone can always claim a higher and higher number of the saved, thus claiming that God is “more gracious” than he would have been had he not saved as many people as an increasing scale dictates. In other words, the further the number of the saved is ratcheted up, the greater is God’s grace.

The trap of such faulty reasoning is that ultimately one must conclude with Universalism, otherwise it is determined that God is not as gracious as he could have been. Restated, if God saved every single individual except one person, it could be concluded that he was not as gracious as he could have been had he saved everybody. Thus the problem with attempting to define God’s nature and character through mathematics. It must inevitably end up with Universalism, else God is not as gracious as he could have been.³³⁵

“But is not the God of the inclusivist more gracious than the God of the exclusivist?” Again, attempting to quantify God’s character by counting the number of the saved is faulty theology. If this were indeed possible to do, a gradation concerning the grace of God could be developed as such:

Universalism > Pluralism > Inclusivism > Exclusivism

The God of the universalist is more gracious than the God of the pluralist, and so on down the line. It is far more reasonable, though, to simply say that because God saves some people, he is gracious. Obviously, had he saved no one, grace could not be considered to be one of his attributes, anymore than had he chosen to save everybody, wrath or righteousness could not be considered to be one of his attributes.

³³⁵ In other words, has sin not ultimately won the battle if God only saves a minority of humanity from its effects? However, such an argument based on mathematical conjecturing 1) ignores the statement of Jesus that many walk the road that leads to destruction and few travel the road that leads to life, and 2) is not consistent. For the latter, one could argue that even if only one person dies in his sins and spends an eternity separated from God’s mercy sin has still won the battle, that God’s grace is limited in this sense. And a 51%/49% scenario still only proves that God’s grace won by a small margin, which is ultimately what the universalist argues anyway. If *all* people are not saved, so says the universalist, then God’s grace in the cross of Christ is seemingly insufficient. In short, theological statements cannot be made based on mathematics any more than mathematical statements can be made based on theology. At what point is it concluded that God is not “loving” or “infinitely merciful?” Does God need to save 51% of humanity in order to be considered loving? Just so long as there are more people saved than lost, does that make God merciful? Or does God need to make the salvation at least available to every individual in order to be considered loving? Must God actually save absolutely every individual in order to be considered loving? What if God saves all but one person, who then spends an eternity in torment. Could it then be concluded that God is not infinitely benevolent?

Why has so much time been taken to discuss this matter? For the exclusivist, the fact that God shows grace to sinners is good enough to say that God is a gracious God. For the other categories, though, such a conclusion is unsatisfactory and is usually tied to numbers, an apparently faulty way of making theological conclusions about the nature of God.

3.6.4 Conclusion to Soteriological Evaluation

In the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, the character of the king in the parable exudes mercy – up to a point. Upon hearing about the actions of the unmerciful servant, he seizes him and has him thrown into prison to be tortured and until he can pay back everything he owed. Of course, once in prison, the man will not be able to pay back anything, and that is the point. He was forgiven a debt he could never have paid back and now, due to his own unforgiving heart, he will experience first hand just how much he had been forgiven.

When sharing the gospel, which is *the* message of forgiveness, these two factors should not be ignored. Far too often, the gospel is portrayed as only a message of God’s forgiveness, which in turn is meant to motivate sinners to accept this gift of forgiveness (what inclusivists often mean when they speak of God “wooing” sinners). But the message of God’s judgment is also a motivating influence. Jesus has given two reasons why Christians should be people of forgiveness, because God has shown forgiveness, and because God will not tolerate unforgiving people in his kingdom. There is both a positive and a negative motivation presented in this parable. Similarly, in sharing the ultimate message of forgiveness, evangelicals should present both of these motivations

Inclusivists like Pinnock believe that speaking of God’s judgment is just a “big stick” used to get people into churches. But was that the motivation of Jesus, because he certainly spoke often about the judgment of his Father? Rather, are exclusivists accustomed to speaking about judgment because, as Jesus commanded, they are supposed to teach everything that he taught?

Inclusivists apparently want to mute the judgment of God. Jesus says that few will be saved, but inclusivists insist that many will be. Time and time again Scripture speaks of God’s electing, choosing, and predestining, but inclusivists consistently denigrate the Calvinist notion that God does precisely these things. The biblical depiction of non-Judeo-Christian faiths is virtually always negative, but inclusivists have practically nothing bad to say about them. Exclusivists are mocked for their understanding that relatively few people will be saved, and yet, is this not precisely what happened at the time of Noah and the Great Flood, a flood that was used by Jesus as a type of the eschatological judgment to come?

Inclusivists claim that honest, sincere adherents of non-Christian faiths will be saved by their good deeds, but is this truly what Scripture says?

Inclusivists say that a “wider hope” is necessary in evangelical theology, as opposed to the “fewness” doctrine that has pervaded it, but are they not holding out a false hope? As this study moves toward its conclusion, this will be the main question that needs to be answer.

Chapter 4

Muted Judgment: The Conclusion to this Study

“The first doctrine to be denied is judgment.”³³⁶

The end of this study of inclusivism and its impact on contemporary American evangelicalism has come. Although observations, evaluations, and criticisms have already been made in the concluding portions of each previous section, a summarisation of those findings and some broader conclusions will be made. It is not intended to recount every difficulty or problem; the previous sections can be consulted for that.

First, some of the positive contributions inclusivists have made to American evangelical theology will be provided.

4.1 Positive Contributions to American Evangelicalism

On the positive side, inclusivists like Pinnock have exposed evangelicals to areas of theology they have generally ignored. Pinnock’s desire for evangelicals to appreciate Eastern Orthodoxy and what it can contribute to an overall understanding of God’s salvific plan in the world should be applauded. Western Christianity’s concentration on the unity of the Trinity must be counterbalanced by Orthodoxy’s emphasis on the diversity of the Persons. Western Christianity’s fixation on sin as humanity’s sole plight must be compensated for by Orthodoxy’s stress on death and the mortality of humankind. Pinnock is correct when he says that evangelicals have concentrated so much on the atonement (which deals with the problem of sin) that they have lost sight of the importance of the resurrection (which addresses mortality).

When Pinnock turns to the Cappadocian Fathers for their greater consideration of the role of the Holy Spirit, he should be applauded. Salvation is not simply embodied in mental assent to propositional truths, but it is also a participation in the life of Jesus through the Spirit. When Pinnock states that Luther’s emphasis on justification by faith has since the Reformation caused Protestants to concentrate on the legal aspects of salvation as opposed to the relational ones as embodied in Orthodoxy’s notion of *theosis*, evangelicals should give thoughtful consideration to his point-of-view. There is much to learn from Pinnock (and inclusivists in general) in these areas.

³³⁶ Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967) 68.

Further, evangelicals cannot help but cheer whenever Pinnock rightly calls to task pluralism and its embrace of liberalism. When he turns a critical eye toward the deficient views liberalism maintains concerning Christ's person, the incarnation and Trinity, and the authority of Scripture, evangelicals should express their approval. There are simply too many flaws in the pluralism of Hick and others for evangelicals to adopt it.

In any theological movement, there is always a need for balance. American evangelicalism represents a huge Protestant block of believers encompassing a wide variety of churches and denominations. It has been a movement characterised by vibrant missions, social (and political) activism, and churches which have by and large been growing while mainline Protestant denominations have been shrinking. There is much to say that is positive about the movement.

But in such movements, there is always the potential for stagnation. Inclusivists believe themselves to not only recognise this stagnation, but to also offer powerful correctives for it.³³⁷ They rightly note, for example, that a Calvinist variety of evangelicalism has the potential for fatalistic views with respect to missions and evangelism. Although this is certainly not automatic (the father of the modern missions movement, William Carey, was a Calvinist), there can be a tendency where people outside the faith are all but forgotten. An apathy can result when God's predestining will is pushed to the fore at the expense of any human responsibility.

Add to this the potential for a "holy huddle" mentality. American evangelicals have large churches, large publishing houses, large colleges, seminaries and universities, and large corporations. It is possible for an evangelical believer to spend his or her entire life from birth until death with little interaction outside evangelical structures, whether that be in the religious, vocational, or educational arenas. If this is coupled with a general American attitude that overlooks the rest of the world, the potential difficulties are only accentuated.

Inclusivists see all of this and they rightly warn the greater evangelical community of impending disaster. In fact, they believe that some of the disaster has already hit Christianity in the fewness doctrine and the widespread belief in a conscious, eternal hell. Although the finer points can be debated, the broader observation is not without substance. Evangelical inclusivism can serve as a wake-up call for the wider evangelical community which may have

³³⁷ Inclusivists see their brand of theology in the ascendancy and they take comfort in this. Yet, as Erickson sarcastically notes, "the most rapidly growing human body cells are malignant cells" (1997:14). In other words, just because a movement is apparently growing, this does not mean it is healthy.

the tendency to become harsh, insensitive, and apathetic. Any system which calls for a greater love of God and fellow humanity should be applauded.

There is much that is appealing in the inclusivism of Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and the like. It must be recognised at bare minimum that their desire to envision the gracious love of God in as wide a range as possible is a noble goal. They have a very strong yearning to see the glory of God through Jesus Christ revealed in the fullest way possible, without succumbing to pluralist liberalism. The objective truth of Jesus Christ rings loud and clear, and their hopefulness in the missions endeavour is contagious. However, a hard question must be asked: At what expense are they willing to pursue this wider hope, and do they really avoid the pluralism they attempt to shun?

Inclusivism is the ethos which drives Open Theism. In the desire to see God's plan of salvation envisioned in a wider arena than the typical exclusivism which has dominated American evangelicalism has done, inclusivists have been driven to radical aberrations from traditional tenets of the faith in all areas of their theology. It is to these that attention is now given.

4.2 Are Evangelical Inclusivists Really Evangelical?

It appears at times that inclusivism suffers from too much of a good thing. For example, Pinnock has made it clear his desire for theological change and greater theological movement within the evangelical fold. But at what point does one move so far as to be unable to honestly declare oneself an evangelical? Certainly evangelicals should be looking for ways to present Christian theology in ways understandable and culturally relevant to the current generation, but at what point has cultural relevance superseded biblical truth?

Inclusivists and particularly Pinnock have an obvious axe to grind with Augustinian and Calvinist theology. They are certainly free to do so within evangelical bounds. And yet, it appears too convenient that Pinnock consistently lays all of the problems with evangelical theology at the feet of the bishop of Hippo and the reformer at Geneva. A rabid dislike of Calvinism, while embracing a radical Arminianism, has almost made some inclusivists blind to the fact that many doctrines they currently oppose are not strictly Calvinist doctrines at all. In fact, there are many doctrines which the inclusivists attack which were firmly held by Arminians. Certainly, Augustine looms large when it comes to the doctrine of predestination, but must blame be laid at his feet for the view of hell as eternal, conscious torment, or for the fewness doctrine, or for the inerrancy of Scripture, just to name a few? Such a methodology of blame appears too sloppy and historically inaccurate.

Their caricature of Calvin's theology and that of Calvinism in general is not often fair. Gerrish argues quite forcefully that such a caricature of Calvinism, one devoid of any sense of God's love but rather overcome with the vengeance and judgment of God, is not a fair representation of Calvin's thought.³³⁸ There appears to be a desire among inclusivists, and particularly Pinnock, to demonise Calvinism at all costs. Perhaps he is just theologically practising what personally happened to him. Once the gap vacated by his abandonment of Calvinism was created, he had to fill it with something. Perhaps Pinnock believes that he can create that vacancy in others as well by demonising Calvinism. Whatever the case, it serves his purpose to caricature the theology of Calvin (and Augustine) as dismal, cruel, unloving, abysmal views of God, but all this really is is a caricature and nothing more.

Inclusivists believe that typical evangelical systems which espouse the fewness doctrine, claim that salvation is only found in explicit knowledge of Jesus, and posit a literal hell are the kinds of systems which breed pluralists and atheists. However, once you have lessened the glory of God to a level where, as Barth once said, he is tantamount to "speaking of man with a loud voice," could this not equally create pluralists and atheists? A God stripped of claws and teeth looks decidedly post-modern, not biblical.³³⁹ Regardless, it does not stand to reason that atheists are created by Christian theology, whether it be good or bad, biblical or non-biblical.

Is it true that traditional evangelicalism has made pluralists and atheists, as Pinnock is wont to claim? It would be hard to test his theory in this regard. However, one could equally say that the evangelical understanding of salvation by faith and not by works could produce licentiousness in Christians, or that the Christian belief that certain behaviour is sinful could produce legalism. It appears to be misguided to choose one's theological persuasion based on whether or not it has a greater likelihood of producing atheists, even if such a thing were possible. Besides, even solid theology can be abused by those determined to do so.

Pinnock believes that Arminianism is superior to Calvinism for this very reason, and that the radical Arminianism of Open Theism is even superior to traditional Arminianism. However, Pinnock appears to be stacking the deck against Calvinism based on little more than his own experience and preconceptions. Because Pinnock finds Calvinism so distasteful, he

³³⁸ Gerrish, B. A. *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002).

³³⁹ Dirkie Smit, Systematic Theology professor at the University of Stellenbosch, in his unpublished article "Justification and Divine Justice?", notes that certain theological points-of-view which sometimes involve "the complete rejection of all language of wrath and judgment" are "clearly appeasing contemporary cultural sensibilities."

assumes that others will to. But there are plenty of atheists, one would assume, who find *any* belief in God equally distasteful.

At times inclusivists appear more generous to atheists than they do to exclusivists. While exclusivists are frequently compared to Pharisees, with all of the attending condemnations from Jesus, atheists can actually be saved according to inclusivism, even when they go to the grave denying the very existence of God. There is a venomous dislike for traditional, Calvinistic evangelicalism which oozes from inclusivist scholars, to the point that it apparently skews even their own thinking.

Pinnock claims that old theological systems no longer speak to the new generation, but should he be allowed to just assume this? Certainly, it depends to whom one is speaking. There are plenty of evangelicals who find the old ways perfectly adequate. The Patristic Fathers spoke of the Word of God as without error, and that doctrine has held up quite nicely for many centuries. Just because something is old does not make it irrelevant. Arminianism is not all that younger than Calvinism for that matter. Still, inclusivists at least are consistent in this area. They are not subscribing to an Arminianism that is four hundred years old. Rather, they are tweaking that Arminianism to fit the times as well, even to the point where many Arminians are not all that happy with the revised edition.

Change within limits can be good, but unlimited change can be misleading and potentially damaging, especially when the meaning of terms is changed while retaining the same terms in popular usage. Inclusivism (and especially Open Theism) appears to move so far away from traditional evangelical doctrine that to use the word “evangelical” to label the movement appears disingenuous, if not sinister.

Although labels can always be misconstrued, there is a certain safety in using them. If someone were to invite a guest speaker to preach at church, there should be a certain security when that guest uses the word “evangelical” to describe himself or herself. They should not have to ask fifty questions just to be sure, only to find out at question number 49 that this person really is not an evangelical as the term has come to be widely understood.

However, even that is not an entirely accurate representation of what is wrong with inclusivism calling itself evangelical. The real problem is that of the fifty questions to be addressed, less and less are answered in evangelical ways. Certainly there is overlapping in some major areas, but in many more areas the divergence is increasing at an alarming rate.

Perhaps a better term than inclusivism is to call the movement “evangelical pluralism.” However, even that distinction is not accurate, because the theology they appear to be espousing is much closer to pluralism than to traditional evangelicalism. When some

exclusivists claim that inclusivists have no business calling themselves evangelicals, they may have a point.

Inclusivists have taken a *via media* between pluralism and exclusivism. In their opinion, this means that they can share in the benefits of both, but to their detractors, the inclusivists suffer from attacks coming from either side. To the pluralist, inclusivists still appear too narrow-minded and focused on salvation coming via only one avenue. To the exclusivist, inclusivists appear too open-minded and positive toward religious traditions which do not take Jesus into account, or who have a faulty view of him.

The inclusivist desire, then, to strike a balance between particularity and universality has caused some to object that inclusivism really has no benefit. Sitting on the fence as it were makes them appear to have not committed either way.

In defence of inclusivists, one could say they are clearly not pluralists. Yet, can they properly be considered evangelicals? As key doctrinal differences between inclusivism and traditional evangelicalism are considered, that question must eventually be answered in the negative.

4.3 Systematic Failures

Traditional American evangelicalism has been strongly biblical. Since the modernist/fundamentalist debates that plagued Protestantism in the early decades of the twentieth century, evangelicalism has been bred out of a biblical doctrine that strongly favours inerrancy. In fact, it would not be inaccurate to place biblical inerrancy as one of the top three if not the single most important factor in determining one's evangelical stance.

Put another way, if someone were to discard inerrancy, the entire evangelical house of cards would come crashing down. For right or wrong, traditional evangelicalism has held that once biblical inerrancy is eradicated, so eventually will all other cardinal doctrines of the faith. And when Pinnock and Sanders suggest theistic systems which question the biblical portrayal of God, perhaps such fears are all-too-real. Once it is admitted that the Bible has errors, even if this is only intended to allow "minor" ones, will such a view not inevitably move to major issues?

Inclusivists seem more concerned that they maintain certain philosophical axioms (eg., love must not be coerced, the freewill of humans must not be violated, salvation must be universally accessible) than remain biblical. For example, Pinnock makes this telling statement: "The Bible has no developed doctrine of universal prevenient grace, however convenient it would be for us if it did" (*Grace/Will*, 22), yet universal prevenient grace plays a

huge role in his Pneumatology. To be clear, if one were to remove Pinnock's reliance on prevenient grace, his entire inclusivism would begin to crumble. This makes one wonder how biblically appealing his inclusivism should be to evangelicals.

For all of their talk against liberalism's esteem of human autonomy, it appears that inclusivists behave similarly. The judgment of God is difficult to maintain in any biblical sense when human autonomy is placed at such a premium as is done in inclusivism. This love for human freedom has resulted in inclusivism's utter contempt for an evangelicalism which smells of Augustine or Calvin, in a refashioned hell where its inhabitants want to be there, or where hell does not even exist, and where God's nature is so dissimilar to that of traditional theism that he is hardly recognisable. It is unfair for God to judge individuals who honestly follow a non-Christian religion, and much of Scripture and specifically the teaching of Jesus is swept away because a hermeneutic of hope is preferred to the exclusion of a hermeneutic of judgment.

Ironically, inclusivists have unwittingly abandoned human autonomy by forcing upon humanity a salvation already decided against by Adam in the Garden. Pinnock's participatory model of the atonement has God become a human to undo what humanity precisely chose. This can hardly be said to preserve human freedom. In this way, even prevenient grace can be said to violate human autonomy.

It must be maintained that any act of salvation on the part of God must violate human freedom, if the biblical teaching on humanity's sin is taken seriously. The only way to save a rebel is to violate that rebel's will. No amount of wooing will do it if the person is truly dead in sin. In an inclusivist model, God appears more interested in preserving human freedom than in actually saving humans. But as already seen, God indeed does violate human autonomy, both in his acts of judgment and salvation.

In their concentration on God's desire to preserve human freedom, and his self-limiting to make this possible, inclusivists appear to have forgotten that a world filled with free humans – no matter how much self-limiting God may do – still does not create a free world. Humans are violating the freewill of other humans all the time. Even the popular annihilationist view of hell does not entirely preserve human freedom, for it can be assumed that there will be some humans who do not want to be annihilated. In virtually every way, inclusivism fails to produce what it so vigorously endeavours to produce, a Christian soteriological system which preserves human autonomy.

A secular understanding which equates love with tolerance has also apparently infiltrated inclusivism, with drastic consequences. Apparently God will not judge the sincere idolater, or

the honest pagan, or even the hardworking atheist, so long as they unwittingly perform some of the good works Jesus commanded of his disciples. This refashioned God appears less and less to be the “God of Jesus,” a phrase which inclusivists so much like to utilise, but which in the end appears pointless, since individuals do not even need to know about the God of Jesus.

Inclusivists work hard to reconfigure the biblical portrait of God, especially via their selective usage of the teaching of Jesus. But then they turn around and state that knowledge of this God is not even necessary for salvation. Real knowledge has been replaced by no knowledge at all. They have unwittingly cut themselves off at the knees. If no knowledge of the biblical God is necessary (or knowledge of his Son for that matter), it appears pointless to spend so much time attempting to change the traditional theism of evangelicalism. The fear of traditional evangelicals has now been realised: inclusivists have effectively discarded the Bible.

What happens to someone who has never heard the gospel? Inclusivists make it clear that universalism is not an option because it violates human freedom, and they have also equally taken to task the traditional evangelicalism which has tended to answer that question in the negative, namely, that those who die apart from knowledge of Jesus Christ are eternally lost. But they have also expressed dislike for pluralism’s option and the inclusivism of Catholics like Rahner, yet inclusivists are only a hairbreadth’s away from both. The non-Christian who has died can still be saved via works that are deemed pleasing to God. After all, this is the most loving thing for a Creator to do.

Perhaps the most unappealing aspect of inclusivism’s Soteriology for someone coming from a traditional evangelical point-of-view is its apparent works righteousness. Paul says throughout most of his epistles (most powerfully in Galatians, Romans, and Second Corinthians) that the letter of the Law kills, but the Spirit brings life. The old covenant was unable to save

Special pleading for a “faith principle” falls short. Faith in what? A polytheistic Buddhist who has faith in nothingness can hardly be equated with pagan saints like Job and Melchizedek who worshiped the one true God, Maker of heaven and earth, let alone an atheist who does not even believe such a Maker exists. “Faith” in an inclusivist scheme basically boils down to belief in whatever the individual chooses to believe in, a relativism all too common in pluralistic systems.

Even with a monotheistic Muslim inclusivists are on an uphill battle. Can they honestly maintain that someone who denies the incarnation, atonement, and resurrection of Jesus, let alone the Trinity, is going to be saved because that individual brings a cup of water to

someone in prison? It certainly appears that the faith principle of inclusivism boils down to a Soteriology of works, even for a monotheist who believes in a Creator God.

In essence, God became a human in Jesus Christ to make the way possible for humans, via their good works, to be saved. An incarnation does not even appear necessary in an inclusivist system, especially if all that is really needed for salvation is performing good deeds. What was a broad line between traditional evangelicalism and the other world religions has been thinned to the point of invisibility in inclusivism's formulation. Traditional evangelicals are right to cry foul when inclusivists endeavour to use the term "evangelical" to describe their movement.

A serious deficiency with inclusivism, at least from an evangelical perspective, is in its understanding of salvation for non-Christians and even atheists. There is a sense where inclusivists have given up all the ground won by the Protestant reformers five hundred years ago. In their appreciation for Catholicism and specifically Vatican II, they appear to have become too Catholic. The battle cry of *sola fide* and the struggles over justification by faith have been swept away when an atheist can now do good works meriting salvation. The "faith principle" espoused by inclusivists might work with adherents of other religions, but it can hardly be said to be present in a person who does not even believe in God.³⁴⁰

The Soteriology of inclusivism (whether evangelical or Catholic) boils down to a works-righteousness that bears remarkable resemblance to pluralistic systems. Exclusivists would possibly expect this from semi-Pelagian Catholics, but not evangelicals in the tradition of Martin Luther and John Calvin (or Jacobus Arminius or John Wesley for that matter). When debating whether or not inclusivists should be allowed to call themselves evangelicals, perhaps even asking if they should be properly considered Protestants is not too far out of line.

Perhaps this is an inherent problem in all soteriological systems which place such a premium on the love of God. Once "God is love" supersedes all other biblical formulas describing God's character, it is a small step to "God will basically accept or tolerate anybody." Unfortunately, inclusivism tends toward pluralism's salvific view of non-Christian religions. Carl Henry makes a cogent, and typically evangelical, point in this regard.

"The notion that God's historical covenants embrace all world religions as part of the church that finds fulfillment in Christ, and that Christ is present in nonbiblical

³⁴⁰ In the Old Testament, when people approached God on their own terms it meant judgment, death and discipline. This process is seen in Cain's offering (Gen. 4:5), Nadab's strange fire (Lev. 10:1-2) and Saul's sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22-23).

religious history from the beginning, is alien to biblical teaching and arbitrarily correlates religion in general with redemptive religion. The New Testament does indeed represent the whole cosmos and all history as finding its final reconciliation in Christ. But from this emphasis we cannot logically infer that nonbiblical religious writings point to Christ in some hidden way. While God's saving design in the Bible has certain universal implications, it does not welcome the world's works-religions as prefatory to the propitiatory work of the Redeemer. The nonbiblical religions and religious writings are not oriented to Christ."³⁴¹

There is a sense where inclusivists have missed the primary purpose of Jesus coming into the world. Jesus did not come to make salvation possible, he came to make it certain. As Pinnock notes, "Christ's death on behalf of the race evidently did not automatically secure for anyone an actual reconciled relationship with God, but made it possible for people to enter into such a relationship by faith" (*Grace & Will*, 23). But how does this compare with Jesus' own description of his mission? "For the Son of Man came to seek *and to save* what was lost" (Lk. 19:10). Jesus' mission makes salvation actual, not just possible. However, because of their revulsion for limited atonement, inclusivists need to refashion the mission of Jesus along these lines.

The person of the Son of God has been lost in inclusivism's attempt for a wider hope. They have sacrificed Christian particularity for a modern universality that is akin to pluralism. They have driven a Gnostic wedge between the God of the Old Testament and his Son as revealed in the New, and by selectively picking and choosing which of the Son's teachings to emphasise, they have violated the very Great Commission they want so much to make more open. In fact, is it not this very desire, to create a wider hope where none biblically exists, that is the downfall of inclusivism? It appears difficult if not impossible to maintain the particularity of Christ in inclusivist theology, and once that particularity is erased, inclusivism naturally blends into pluralism.

There appears to be a problem in inclusivist teaching, one which confuses God's personal action in Jesus Christ with his universal presence. This lack of qualitative distinction confuses inclusivist Soteriology, where a pre-conversion Saul of Tarsus or a pagan Cornelius or even an atheist can be saved. Exclusivists are rightly concerned, then, when inclusivists claim that salvation is only through Jesus. Once again, the universal presence of God and his

³⁴¹ *Carl Henry at His Best* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1989) (no author or editor cited) 209.

Spirit supplants the particularity of Christ, making such exclusivist sounding claims to ring hollow.

Inclusivists make it a point that Bibliology should not be divorced from Pneumatology, and they cite traditional evangelicalism's error in this regard. And yet, is this not precisely what inclusivists do in the final analysis? By having the Spirit move in ways contrary to the Word he inspired, inclusivists are creating a bifurcation between Spirit and Word.

The positive view of the universality of religion and the *imago Dei* has erased any consideration of the universality of sin. This is why inclusivists can speak positively about the Covenant of Noah as still applying and even granting salvific benefits, while ignoring the fact that the vast majority of humanity was wiped out in Noah's flood, an eloquent statement for the fewness doctrine. Further, inclusivists can read Paul's arguments in the first three chapters of Romans and come away with positive feelings about humanity's potential, while ignoring all the damning statements about humanity's sin and its effects. In short, inclusivism's positive views of the *imago Dei*, general revelation, and prevenient grace all fail to take into account the universal problem of sin.

The negative biblical portrayal of non-Judeo-Christian religions has already been addressed. The selective usage by inclusivists of "pagan saints" is wanting, in that they have not adequately proven that such individuals were actually drawn to the one, true God via their pagan religions. Rather, as already noted in detail, virtually every one of them had some content of special revelation which made Jehovah known to them. The exclusivist position that these other faiths are false appears to make the stronger biblical case. God is not using these religions to draw people to himself. Rather, these religions are drawing people away from God.

What is the soteriological picture inclusivism paints? When expressed in full-blown Open Theism, the picture is rather disconcerting for traditional evangelicals, and with good reason. Picture a God who does not know the future choices of his creatures, who learns as time moves forward and who can change, and who is so consumed with human freedom to choose that he will not violate it. Further consider that this God will grant salvation not only to those people holding views entirely contrary to the revelation he has given in the Bible, but he will even save an atheist so long as that atheist does some of the things Jesus expected his disciples to do.

The practical outworking of inclusivism is best seen in its effect on world missions. It is difficult to believe that, given a group of inclusivists and an equal number of exclusivists, that the inclusivists will ultimately have a more vibrant view of missions. Perhaps if one were to

compare a group of Arminians to a group of Calvinists, the Arminians would win the day. However, inclusivists are not simply Arminians, they are much more (or less) than that. It is all of the extra-Arminian trimmings of inclusivism (and Open Theism) which makes its view of missions suspect. Indeed, if Pinnock is correct in assuming that salvation is already possessed by humanity and can only be lost if a person opts out, it stands to reason that the best thing for evangelicals to do is not jeopardise that standing and share the gospel with people who may then reject it. Rather, it is better to not speak about Jesus at all and avoid the risk of individuals opting out. This can hardly be said to be a better alternative than the traditional evangelical view of missions.

An inclusivist optimism to a wider extent of salvation or greater access to its possibility appears biblically unfounded. When Jesus speaks of few, it would be wrong to condemn a fewness doctrine. When Jesus talks of a narrow road that leads to salvation, Christians would be remiss to widen that road because broader paths appeal to them. A faulty inclusivism has resulted from a faulty hermeneutic.

Thus the systematic theology of inclusivism fails in multiform aspects. But where is the initial misstep from which all other missteps ensue? In answering this question, the judgment of God must be considered.

4.4 Where Is God's Judgment?

What have inclusivists compromised in their evangelicalism in order to maintain their wider hope? Here are the key positions they have adopted as a result of their inclusivism:

- ❖ A positive view of non-Christian religions and their potentially salvific benefits
- ❖ An understanding of salvation which appears to be works-based, not faith-based
- ❖ A view of God who cannot know the future choices of free-willed creatures
- ❖ A God who has limited power
- ❖ A God who can change
- ❖ A less-than-evangelical view of the inerrancy of Scripture which borders on neo-orthodoxy
- ❖ A view of Jesus in which he made mistakes in his future predictions
- ❖ Views of the afterlife (annihilationism and post-mortem evangelism) which are tenuous at best³⁴²

³⁴² It has also been characterised by Pelagian and even Gnostic tendencies.

They have not compromised their belief in the Trinity or the incarnation, which is good news, but can such cardinal doctrines be far behind? It would be unfair to answer in the affirmative, but it is also understandable why many evangelicals would answer that way. In fact, have there not already been cracks appearing in their Trinitarian doctrine? Already given the large drift that has occurred among inclusivists from the traditional evangelical position, many surmise that it is only a matter of time that the drift continues until a full-blown liberalism is adopted by these scholars. Only time will tell.

All of the above is driven by a movement away from the judgment of God. Historic exclusivism continues to take seriously the judgment of God as taught in Scripture and evangelical theology. As seen in the case of Pinnock, the drift away from biblical inerrancy was precipitated by his belief that the judgment of God, at least as characterised in the Old Testament, was simply mistaken. But if Jesus could be wrong in some of his predictions, could he not also be wrong in his view of the character of God?

As surprising as that question might be, especially when asked of an evangelical by an evangelical, it is not that far out of line. Twenty years ago if someone were to ask evangelicals if they thought the Bible contained errors, God was less than omnipotent, could change in his very nature, and did not know the future, and non-Christian religions could be used by God to save people, that person would have received a very puzzled if not crazy look. “Are you insane?” might very well have been the retort. But today that is exactly what evangelicals are expressing, and even a vote in the largest evangelical, theological society in North America (and perhaps the world) will not deny them their right to remain “evangelical.”

One wonders how long the inclusivists can maintain the tension between their high Christology and their seemingly liberal tendencies in other areas of theology. Are there too many balls in the air for the inclusivists to juggle?

This is why a hermeneutic of judgment is needed. Reiser is correct when he observes the general trend within Christianity that “judgment . . . silently dropped from consideration” (1997:3). Inclusivists seem to encourage this drop further. It is not too far off base to say that a revulsion for the traditional, exclusivist view of the judgment of God has precipitated a slide by evangelical inclusivists from many other important theological positions.³⁴³

Pinnock rightly calls evangelicals to an emphasis on the love of God. Without it, they are not proclaiming the divine plan of salvation properly. However, the proclamation of divine love must not be allowed to overshadow or even cast out the proclamation of divine

³⁴³ “There is irony in the way careless talk about love, compassion, and universal accessibility can quickly produce shaky theological thinking” (Nash, 1994:134).

judgment. “God is love” must not be quoted to the exclusion of “God is a consuming fire.” Both need to be in the gospel proclamation. One does not automatically take precedent over the other. Both have a legitimate part to play in the salvation message. A hermeneutic of hope must be coupled with a hermeneutic of judgment. “Salvation” only makes sense in the context of danger.

There are real, eternal consequences to sin. That is the message Jesus teaches. The consequences are so drastic and dramatic that it would be better for a person to cut off a hand or gouge out an eye if in so doing that person was able to escape such consequences. Like a meteorologist who warns of an impending hurricane or monsoon, so Jesus stands before humankind and warns of the disaster that is to come to those who do not repent of their sins and follow him.

For Jesus, it seems, had no problem speaking about the love of the Father as well as his judgment and wrath. He did not play one attribute of God against another, so as to make one entirely operative in his theology and the other inconsequential, something many inclusivists do.³⁴⁴ Their revulsion toward a hermeneutic of judgment causes them to downplay or outright ignore the judgment sayings and actions of Jesus. It causes them to recast the biblical view of hell, making it more “user friendly.” It also causes them to reconfigure their doctrine of God, a God who respects human autonomy to painful degrees, and whose love overrides virtually all notions of wrath and judgment.

All of this would obviously yield a wider hope and an optimism when considering non-Christian religions. But is the cost too high? What has evangelical theology lost when it gains a wider hope, but apparently distances itself from much traditional Christian thought? Is an omni-competent God better than the classic omniscient one? Are inclusivists truly able to call themselves evangelicals while they consider parts of the Old Testament portrayal of God’s character to be inaccurate?

Lastly, for all of their talk against pluralism, inclusivists appear strangely pluralistic. Perhaps this is just a natural product of the modern mindset. “Pluralistic society inclines to cultural and religious relativism as water runs downhill.”³⁴⁵ Much of the inclusivist methodology mimics that of pluralism. They question biblical inerrancy, they look at the

³⁴⁴ In the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, there is a clear teaching on the conscious torment, regret and remorse that accompanies hell. In fact, the entire story is given as an illustration of the coming judgment. The parable would make little sense in a universalist or annihilationist scheme, and certainly would not have been told by Jesus had he been either of these.

³⁴⁵ McGavran, Donald. *The Clash Between Christianity and Cultures* (Washington, D.C.: Canon Press, 1974).

morality of adherents of non-Christian faiths and conclude that God must approve of them, and their emphasis on the love of God could be easily confused with pluralistic tolerance.

And yet, it would be unfair to call inclusivists pluralists, despite the many similarities. Inclusivists do not attempt to scrub Christianity clean of the particularity of the cross, nor of the doctrines of Trinity and incarnation. They most certainly cannot be labelled liberals in the anti-supernatural sense that term often implies. And despite evangelical fears that inclusivists, so long as they hold true to the basic assumptions they have adopted, will eventually go to these liberal extremes, the fact of the matter is they have not done so at present.

Yet, for the many reasons given throughout this dissertation, inclusivism is not an appealing biblical or theological alternative to exclusivism. As much as the latter still leaves many hard, unanswered questions, inclusivism does not provide an alternative which adequately answers them. In fact, it creates even greater problems than it alleviates.

In seeking a wider hope, inclusivism has excised the judgment of God. In doing so, it remains a hopeless theological system that can only be judged as inadequate in its portrayal of the Christian God and his plan of salvation.

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