

# “Misgivings” and “Openness”: A Dialogue on Inclusivism Between R. Douglas Geivett and Clark Pinnock

*Editor’s Note:* This exchange between Doug Geivett and Clark Pinnock is printed here to familiarize *SBJT*’s readers with Inclusivism’s claims. As *SBJT* 1/1, 1/2, and 1/4 have made plain, this journal’s editorial board does not agree with Pinnock’s Freewill Theism or his views on Inclusivism. Still, we thought it appropriate to let Dr. Pinnock address our readers in this way. We believe that readers will be able to see the clear differences between traditional evangelicalism and what he proposes.

## Some Misgivings About Evangelical Inclusivism

*R. Douglas Geivett*

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Max Warren has observed that “the impact of agnostic science will turn out to be child’s play compared to the challenge to Christian theology of the faiths of other men.”<sup>1</sup> One sort of response to this challenge is what I will call “evangelical inclusivism.” Whether or not evangelical inclusivism is growing in popularity I cannot say;<sup>2</sup> it certainly attracts a great deal of attention these days. At any rate I find the recent recrudescence of inclusivism among evangelicals somewhat unsettling—and I sense that I am not alone.

As it happens, it is difficult to conduct a fully general assessment of inclusivism. This is partly because the label “inclusivism” means different things to different people. It even means different things to different self-described inclusivists. Whereas inclusivists seem to agree that there are varieties of inclusivism, self-described inclusivists do not agree about what counts as a variety of inclusivism. Thus, from the point of

view of one self-described inclusivist another self-described inclusivist may not be an inclusivist at all. (From now on I dispense with the term “self-described inclusivist” and let the unqualified term “inclusivist” do the same semantic work.)

Clark Pinnock and I will be exploring the strengths and weaknesses of his own inclusivist proposal, familiar to many through his various publications. The topic and format of this exchange was proposed by the president of the Evangelical Philosophical Society and agreed to by the two of us. It should not be inferred from this arrangement, however, that I assume Pinnock owns a special burden of proof in all exchanges between himself and his detractors. Inclusivists have sometimes complained that exclusivists have generally neglected to state and defend their own positions clearly.<sup>3</sup> Anyone interested in my positive account of the uniqueness of Christianity in a religiously pluralistic world is encouraged to consult

the essays I have contributed to the books *Jesus Under Fire* and *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*.<sup>4</sup>

The focus of the present paper is a series of misgivings I have about Pinnock's "wider hope" proposal. I characterize my objections to Pinnock's inclusivism as "misgivings" for reasons I will explain later. To begin, however, let me identify the most salient feature of Pinnock's inclusivism as I understand it.

It may seem obvious that Clark Pinnock is an inclusivist. He certainly uses the term as a label for his position. But what is perhaps not so well understood is how he *defines* inclusivism.<sup>5</sup> Part of what it means to be a Christian inclusivist is to insist "that Jesus is the only mediator and that all must come to him and through him."<sup>6</sup> But inclusivists also embrace what Pinnock calls "a wider hope." They affirm the possibility of salvation for non-Christians—in particular, the unevangelized.<sup>7</sup> Even this, however, is not enough to make one an inclusivist. One must also hold that non-Christian religions have some sort of saving value.<sup>8</sup> Though inclusivists differ with respect to the role they assign to religions in salvation, they do not differ in assigning some role or other.

Let us call this claim about the soteriological significance of non-Christian religions the Strong Inclusivist Condition. Rather than take a firm stand on how best to define Christian inclusivism, let us distinguish between an inclusivism that embraces the Strong Inclusivist Condition (Strong Inclusivism) and an inclusivism that either repudiates the Strong Inclusivist Condition or is neutral with respect to it (Weak Inclusivism). Pinnock is a Strong

Inclusivist. I turn now to some misgivings about Pinnock's acceptance of the Strong Inclusivist Condition.

First, a minor misgiving. Notice that it becomes impossible, due to his acceptance of the Strong Inclusivist Condition, for Pinnock to allow the designation "inclusivist" for others who call themselves inclusivists. John Sanders, for example, is an evangelical inclusivist who appears unwilling to accept the Strong Inclusivist Condition. The irony here is that Pinnock and Sanders have, through their collaborative efforts, created an impression that they represent a more-or-less united front—that they stand shoulder-to-shoulder in the vanguard of Christian inclusivism. Despite the fact that from Pinnock's vantage point Sanders must be represented as an exclusivist rather than an inclusivist, Pinnock had this to say in the foreword to Sander's 1992 book: "Sanders provides an exposition of the wider hope that is superior to anything we presently possess."<sup>9</sup> (During the same year, Pinnock's own book *A Wideness in God's Mercy* was published.) How are we to escape the impression that there is mischief in this commendation?

Second, turning to a more serious misgiving, Strong Inclusivism is severely undersupported by the evidence of Scripture. Any biblical argument for Strong Inclusivism must make the case for the Strong Inclusivist Condition from the Bible. But what is the biblical evidence that non-Christian religions have saving value? Even if there is room for a wider hope within the framework of biblical teaching, Pinnock has not made the case that such a hope is secured in some way

by elements within non-Christian religions. If the appeal to Scripture on behalf of this wider hope is dubious without the Strong Inclusivist Condition Pinnock endorses, it is doubly so when the Strong Inclusivist Condition is included.

Pinnock says he finds Luke saying things in the Book of Acts “that bear lightly on this matter.”<sup>10</sup> He has in mind the example of Cornelius in Acts 10, the sympathetic allusions to pagan religion in Paul’s preaching at Lystra in Acts 14, and Paul’s conciliatory reference to the Athenian worship of “an unknown God” in Acts 17. In support of the Strong Inclusivist Condition, Pinnock also references the assimilation of non-Jewish elements in Israelite religion, Abraham’s identification of Melchizedek’s God with Yahweh (Ge 14:17-24), Abimelech’s fear of God (Ge 20:1-18), Jethro’s sacrifice for Israel (Ex 18:1-12), Balaam’s prophetic success concerning God’s will for Israel (Nu 23-24), and the worship of Christ by the Magi (Mt 2:1-12).<sup>11</sup> Note that the whole of Pinnock’s exposition of “the holy pagan tradition” of the Bible takes less than six pages.<sup>12</sup>

These passages can hardly bear the weight of the Strong Inclusivist Condition essential to Pinnock’s version of inclusivism. They surely do not warrant the degree of confidence Pinnock exudes in his writings about the soteriological value of non-Christian religions.

Third, Pinnock clearly desires to be understood as endorsing some role for non-Christian religions in salvation. But what precisely is that role? He says he “agrees about the uniqueness of the Christian message but does not refuse to see prevenient grace operating in the sphere of human religion.”<sup>13</sup> What does he mean

by “prevenient grace”? While his concept of prevenient grace is never fully explicated, he does speak of various non-Christian religions as more-or-less suitable “vehicles of salvation.” Using some complex criteria, Pinnock concludes that the religions of Melchizedek and Jethro “seem to have been vehicles of salvation for them,” but that Islam “is not a reliable vehicle of salvation.”<sup>14</sup>

So how does a religion function as a vehicle of salvation? Things come into somewhat sharper focus with the idea of religion as “preparation for the gospel.” When something called “the faith principle” is operative in the life of a non-Christian and in the context of his non-Christian religion, the non-Christian is converted into a “premessianic believer.”<sup>15</sup> As near as I can tell, a premessianic believer is someone who has or would have a disposition to believe in Jesus Christ upon being adequately presented with the Good News. “Premessianic” does not have a temporal reference but an informational reference. Some premessianic believers become Christians during this life, whereas others do not because they never actually hear. But the premessianic believer, who is as such a non-Christian, does receive the gift of “eschatological salvation.”<sup>16</sup>

So the promise of eschatological salvation is grounded in the premessianic believer’s faith, if the premessianic believer would believe upon hearing the Gospel—and whether or not the premessianic believer ever hears the Gospel. If I have this right, the question is whether the elements of non-Christian religions can be responsible for inculcating in one the requisite disposition to be-

lieve upon hearing the Gospel. Since it is likely that most non-Christian religions harbor tenets that are antithetical to this sort of disposition, it seems highly unlikely that this disposition could find fertile ground or a natural home within the non-Christian religions.<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, how is the operation of the faith principle within the life of a non-Christian related to the doctrinal content of that non-Christian person's religious orientation? Pinnock "stops short of saying that the religions themselves as such are vehicles of salvation."<sup>18</sup> "What God really cares about," he stresses, "is faith and not theology, trust and not orthodoxy."<sup>19</sup> "[P]eople are saved by faith and not the content of their theology."<sup>20</sup> But if it is the exercise of faith itself that is soteriologically effectual, in total abstraction from the specific content of the non-Christian's religious faith, then what is the salvific role of the non-Christian religion exactly? Alternatively, if the very elements of non-Christian religion function as "means of grace,"<sup>21</sup> how do they function that way without procuring salvation for the non-Christian?

Fifth, is the faith that is exercised within the framework of a non-Christian religion of the right specific quality to have the salvific effect Pinnock envisages? It could be argued that faith requires an object and that the *quality* of faith (and therefore its effect) is conditioned by its *object*. Another way to put this is to say that the specific quality of a religious believer's faith is "informed" and made to be the sort of faith it is by the object to which it is directed. The object of faith, then, is at least partly constitutive of the character of faith. This may be true even if faith is a completely

free response to the object.

The problem may be described two ways, with each description focusing on one or the other of the two relationships, faith and object. On the object side, the question is whether anything within the non-Christian religions has the properties that give form to the response of faith such that the faith that responds is of the right quality. The answer to this question would require a detailed consideration of the various non-Christian religions.<sup>22</sup>

On the faith side, the question is whether premessianic faith—which is characterized by the disposition to believe the Gospel upon hearing it—is a response to anything identifiable within the non-Christian religions that, as Pinnock says, form the context of that act of faith. Again, answering this question calls for a detailed acquaintance with non-Christian religions. But a carefully developed phenomenology of religious faith is also needed. Unfortunately, it is probably rare that the sort of faith required for eschatological salvation is tied to features of non-Christian religions in the way implied by the Strong Inclusivist Condition.

In short, does the actual faith of non-Christians, under the realistic phenomenological description, conform to the special contours of faith required for salvation, and is that faith rooted in a suitable way to features of non-Christian religions as envisaged by Pinnock?

Sixth, Pinnock's language is uniformly ambiguous when he speaks about the "possibility" that (some) unevangelized persons are helped along by their premessianic faith operating within some non-Christian religious framework. For

example, he says that “we must be alert to the possibility that God is effectively at work in the religious dimension in a given instance, but there are no guarantees of it;”<sup>23</sup> and inclusivism “entails the possibility that religion may play a role in the salvation of the human race.”<sup>24</sup> Does he mean (a) that it is possible though not certain that God sometimes works through non-Christian religions to bring people to saving faith, or (b) that working through non-Christian religions is but one of several modalities that God uses to bring people to saving faith, and that for any given non-Christian it is always a possibility that this is the modality God chooses to use?

My remarks so far have focused on the Strong Inclusivist Condition that plays such an important role in Pinnock’s inclusivism. I now want to shift the focus slightly to examine what I will call the Universal Access Requirement that is also a feature of his position. In particular, I am interested in the relationship between this requirement and another component of his system. But even here Pinnock’s commitment to the Strong Inclusivist Condition contributes to the generation of misgivings about his version of evangelical inclusivism.

Pinnock is committed to the view that “everyone must have access to salvation,” that everyone must have the opportunity to “participate in the salvation of God.”<sup>25</sup> This is the Universal Access Requirement. As Pinnock says, it “raises a difficult question. How is salvation within the reach of the unevangelized? How can anyone be saved without knowing Christ?”<sup>26</sup> He answers that “the faith principle is the basis of universal access.”<sup>27</sup> By distin-

guishing between the act of faith and the specific object of faith, Pinnock attempts “to explain how the unevangelized gain access to God and are finally saved.”<sup>28</sup> He asserts that “we cannot reasonably suppose that a failure of evangelization that affects many millions would leave them completely bereft of any access to God.” He then presents the biblical evidence for the faith principle.<sup>29</sup>

Other statements suggest that Pinnock confidently believes many unevangelized persons will be saved because of the faith they exercise in this life. (Because he accepts the Strong Inclusivist Condition, this probably means that non-Christian religions will be a vehicle through which some of the unevangelized will exercise the faith that saves.) Consider these remarks:

“The Bible does not teach that one must confess the name of Jesus to be saved.”<sup>30</sup>

“This [appeal to the faith principle] is the path I will take to explain how the unevangelized gain access to God and are finally saved.”<sup>31</sup>

“Obviously the unevangelized can be saved by faith just like anyone else.”<sup>32</sup>

“[T]he Bible teaches that many varieties of unevangelized persons will attain salvation. This will happen according to the faith principle.”<sup>33</sup>

These statements, and the contexts in which they are embedded, all indicate that acting according to the faith principle, without the benefit of hearing the Good News, is sufficient for salvation. Hence, it would appear that the Universal Access Requirement is fully satisfied by this proposal.

Immediately following his discussion

of the faith principle,<sup>34</sup> Pinnock considers “another way of conceiving universal access to salvation.” This is “the idea that people would have an opportunity to respond to Christ after death, if they had not had the opportunity to respond before.” The goal of this section of Pinnock’s material is “to weigh this possibility alongside the faith principle and see if they can be combined.”<sup>35</sup>

Here we come to a seventh misgiving. If Pinnock sanctions post-mortem opportunities for the unevangelized to believe in Jesus Christ, can he insist on the Strong Inclusivist Condition? His transition from a consideration of the faith principle to a discussion of the possibility of postmortem opportunities to believe initially suggests that there are two different ways to meet the Universal Access Requirement. Each way appears to be sufficient for the satisfaction of this requirement, and, since there is more than one way to satisfy the requirement, neither way is necessary. If Pinnock allows that the Universal Access Requirement may be satisfied during a post-mortem encounter, then how is the faith principle necessary to his system? But if the faith principle is not necessary, then neither is the Strong Inclusivist Condition.

But can Pinnock, given his commitment to the Strong Inclusivist Condition, really allow that acting on the faith principle within the context of non-Christian religions is not necessary to secure the salvation of certain unevangelized persons?

But now we must ask: Is the exercise of faith on the part of the premessianic believer even sufficient for salvation? There are at least two reasons for thinking that premessianic faith may not be sufficient

for salvation. First, Pinnock himself says,

If pre-Christian faith is inherently prospective, how does it experience fulfillment if the gospel does not arrive in time? . . . If God desires to save sinners, and if sinners have responded positively to the light they have, then it follows that at some point in the future the opportunity to encounter Christ will present itself.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps Pinnock agrees with the exclusivist that explicit faith in Jesus Christ is ultimately required for salvation.

Second, earlier in this paper I interpreted Pinnock’s concept of a “premessianic believer” as the concept of a person whose faith is a sign that if he heard the Good News under satisfactory conditions he would be disposed to believe in Jesus Christ. But given Pinnock’s views about God’s foreknowledge of future free acts,<sup>37</sup> he can hardly countenance the claim that God knows what every person would do if given the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ. Presumably, signs that one has a disposition to believe given the opportunity is no guarantee that one would believe. So the post-mortem encounter represents the crucial test of every premessianic believer’s faith. How would God know that one really was a premessianic believer in Pinnock’s sense without performing the crucial experiment in which the hitherto unevangelized person finally hears the Good News and is given the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ?

These are just a few of the misgivings I have about Clark Pinnock’s inclusivism. I have not pursued the details of his use of Scripture to support his position, nor have I raised any of the missiological

problems I associate with his position. There may yet be time for that. Instead, I have concentrated on the logic of certain major components in his system. It is quite possible that I have misunderstood him and that this will be cleared up during the

ensuing discussion. For that reason I settle for representing the objections raised here as “misgivings.” I have cast these misgivings in the form of questions, and I look forward to hearing Pinnock’s replies.

## Overcoming Misgivings about Evangelical Inclusivism

Clark H. Pinnock

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### Introduction

Inclusivism is a term I use for a theology that observes two axioms: (1) that Jesus Christ is humanity’s exclusive savior and only mediator; and (2) that divine grace and truth are found outside the church and Christian revelation. Inclusivism seeks a middle path between two extremes—restrictivism and pluralism.

Doug notices varieties of inclusivism and asks for an explanation. This definition is a broad one and includes all who hold the two axioms, whatever their differences. Some inclusivists believe other religions play a role in God’s grace, while others do not. I take this difference to be a variation within inclusivism as to how things work out. I would not make it the distinction between weak and strong versions, as Doug does. It seems to me to be a detail in how they think the grace of God works in people who have not heard the gospel. I suppose it could be the basis for a weak/strong distinction. My view is that if God works through other channels than religion, all well and good. In either case, grace is at work. In endnote eight, Doug picked up an inconsistency in my remarks about McGrath, though. Given his wider hope, I should really have claimed him as an inclusivist. It is a small slip but impor-

tant for the typology.

Most terms have limitations. The term “exclusivism” is often used in opposition to “inclusivism,” even though it is not really its opposite, since the latter also holds to the exclusiveness of God’s saving work in Christ as an objective fact. One might call inclusivism an exclusivist position with a wider hope for the unevangelized. In regard to definitions, fuzziness seems to be part of the territory.

Doug and I both think that inclusivism is worth examination. I think so because it is influential almost everywhere in the churches—in the Catholic Church after Vatican II, in the Orthodox churches unburdened by *filioque*, and in the Protestant mainline denominations. Recently the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England issued a study entitled *The Mystery of Salvation* (1995) which endorses inclusivism and cites my book *A Wideness in God’s Mercy*, 176ff. This may be becoming the standard view. I think of it positively as a development of doctrine in the church’s thinking. Recently I came across a study that finds inclusivism in Edward’s thinking.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this will spur evangelicals to give it a more sympathetic look.

Doug’s interest in inclusivism is rather different. He speaks of a “recrudescence”

of it among evangelicals, something that he finds unsettling. This is understandable because the evangelicals are the largest group in the church not to go along with inclusivism. His language is revealing of how he feels about that, since “recrudescence” is used for the outbreak of a disease that has been quiescent. Evidently he does not see it as a valid development of doctrine.

I am not comfortable with his reference to inclusivism as a disease. I think it deserves more respect than that since it seems to be the view now held by large numbers of Christians. I would prefer to speak of it as a “disputed question” on which people differ, as our section does. The term puts me in a bad light as if I was the carrier of a virus. Do we want to use such language with each other? Do we want to put each other down rhetorically? The word “quiescent” crops up in the definition and pleases me more, because it recognizes that the “virus” has been around evangelical traditions (in Wesley, Strong, Kraft, C. S. Lewis, Hackett, etc.) and is not a foreign disease. Maybe it is a good infection, as Lewis might say.

Obviously there is strength of feeling here. Such is always the case with disputed questions of significance. Here is the framework I suggest we use. In the history of doctrine, wheat and tares grow up together. Normally, rather than rooting up the tares, it is best to let the plants grow, because we do not know which plant is which as of yet. It is best to give the discussion time to sink in and watch for the fruit—fruit in terms of positive or negative impact on Christian character and mission. In the spirit of Acts 15, let us ask what the Spirit is leading us to think about this matter and what the directions are in which the Spirit is leading as we move in mission toward the kingdom of God.

## Section One

I want to start, not with Doug’s order of questioning, which places me on the defensive, but with what I consider the most weighty issue for us and one which may relativize the importance of the specific objections. This will give me a chance to say what moves me most, after which I can return to specific queries. I am speaking of axiom two—God’s universal salvific will. It is the nature of God as *abba* that funds wider hope theories in general. Inclusivism is one possible implementation of that axiom and of less significance than the axiom itself.

Support for it arises from the growing recognition among Christians of the priority of God’s love relative to other issues. It has developed from the vision of *abba* who seeks every lost coin and every lost sheep and who longs for the return of each of his lost sons. This (I think) is the factor that accounts for the more positive attitude toward those outside the church among Christians today—not liberalism, not sentimentality, but the gospel. Large numbers are coming to accept that at the top of the hierarchy of Christian truths, and of primary importance, is the will of God for the salvation of the race. Issues like baptism and church membership have become subordinate to it and are being reformulated in order to confirm rather than conflict with it. This shift is helping us move from a ghetto mentality typical of many traditions in the past that saw little grace outside the church toward a spirit of greater openness to people outside the church and those who have not yet heard the gospel. This shift fosters the quest for some sort of wider hope, of which inclusivism is a variety. It explains the reduced inclination to dogmatize about who is in and who is out of God’s

kingdom. It leads one to hope for the other person however dismal the situation.

The conviction is growing in evangelical circles that God is not planning to cast into hell the majority of the race who, through no fault of their own, have had no opportunity to become Christians. There are others of course who still wish to assert that is what will happen. For them, the love of God is not higher than, but on a level with, God's freedom and wrath. The view is coherent, but seems to be getting harder to maintain. Many are thinking there is more hope than that in the Christian message. They are loathe to say God created human beings only to damn most of them and save but a few of them. I think it is God's universal salvific will that gives inclusivism basic plausibility and makes restrictivism seem unlikely. I begin my response with this statement because it is the presupposition which gives rise to wider hope and inclusivist theory and should be acknowledged.

In making this point, I am admitting that presuppositions are at work in the discussion of inclusivism. The proposition that God wills the salvation of every human being is itself contested. More and more may believe it, but not everyone agrees. Reformed traditions in particular maintain double predestination, which leads some to say that God does not care for every human but has from the beginning decided whom to save and whom not to save. They believe that God is within his rights to refuse grace to anyone he has decided to deprive of it. His freedom is complete and his love may discriminate. Although I find this way of thinking difficult, some evangelicals look at things this way and will have little sympathy for my thinking. Yet in their own way they could bridge the gap—if, for

example, they were to think of the elect as numerous and not sparse, or of them sprinkled among non-Christian peoples and loved by God, or of every child of Adam as presumptively elect, as Hodge does. Even from this theological model, one could regard people optimistically, based not upon their worthiness, but upon the breadth of sovereign divine grace. Conflicting theological paradigms are not likely to disappear but it is possible to build bridges over to one another on matters of consequence.

## Section Two

I turn to Doug's specific concerns concerning the wider hope of inclusivism itself and its workings. The fact that God loves the world moves one in the direction of wider hope but does not establish a theory of it. Recall that John Stott, who hopes for the salvation of most people, refuses to say how he thinks this will be accomplished. Although we would like him to offer reasons for his hope, he leaves us without an explanation. Most of us would prefer a reason to be offered, which is what I have attempted to do in my theory, though (I would admit) it is not the only way to think about these things and may be flawed, as Doug believes it is.

It is my opinion that, whereas objective salvation is clear (i.e. through Christ alone—Jn 14:6), subjective salvation is not so straightforward (i.e. how one is saved by Christ). Scripture speaks in different ways about how people are saved subjectively. For example, it says that God loves seekers and rewards them, even if they are not Jews or Christians (Heb 11:6). It says that Christ will save some people who have no idea who Jesus is but who showed by their deeds that they love God's kingdom (Mt 25:37). A

response is required in each case but there can be more than one kind of response. I presume that faith may be based on the true light that enlightens everyone (Jn 1:9). I find support in Paul's statement that people may search for God and find him from anywhere in the world (Ac 17:27). I appreciate him saying that the gentiles have God's law written on their hearts (Ro 2:16) and may be given eternal life when, by patiently doing good, they seek for glory and honor and immortality (Ro 2:7). As a Catholic might put it, there are people with a desire for baptism who have not been able to be baptised. Inclusivism responds to such generous sentiments.

It would be nice to be able to be more precise in explaining how a saving, yet non-Christian faith works. Some of Doug's questions ask for that and I wish I/we knew more about it than we do. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Scripture supports the position that it is possible (however it may be possible) to have faith on the basis of an uncertain amount of revelational information. I adduce the slogan in this connection: if something is actual, it must be possible. We do not have to know how it works in order to acknowledge it.

The Old Testament is clear that one can be saved without knowing about the incarnate Christ. What was required of people during that time (as far as I can tell) was that they seek, repent, and believe. God rewards those who seek him; the wicked must forsake their ways; faith itself is based on what they already know about God. We cannot quantify how much knowledge they must have in order to be saved. Knowing facts can be quantified, but not knowing a Person. God sees the heart and knows who loves him. We agree that people know enough to make them

responsible before God; by the same token grace can reach the heart of people even when the propositional content is minimal. I like what Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli say: "Socrates (or any other pagan) could seek God, could repent of his sins, and could obscurely believe in and accept the God he knew partially and be saved."<sup>2</sup>

We do not know how common these responses are—only that they are possible. Because of biblical promises for a large salvation outcome, I myself hope that it is very common. This optimism is a feature of my version of inclusivism that differs from others. Sanders makes no such claim. My view agrees with John Stott, but goes further than he does in trying to explain it.

Control beliefs are at work. The presupposition about God's universal salvific will biases me toward favoring inclusivist arguments. Maybe it makes me think better of them than I should, because I want them or something like them to be true. I know that necessity can be the mother of invention. At the same time, accepting the doctrine of restrictivism, that God is free to damn people in large numbers seemingly arbitrarily disposes a person against seeing the biblical evidence for inclusivism or makes them feel it is unacceptably slight. I agree that inclusivism is not a central topic of discussion in the Bible and that the evidence for it is less than one would like. But the vision of God's love there is so strong that the existing evidence seems sufficient to me. I understand, however, why someone might not find it sufficient.

Another feature of my version of inclusivism is an openness, not only to grace outside the church like all inclusivists have, but to the possibility that other religions might play a role in making faith possible. In my book, I appeal to

Scriptures addressing the accounts of Melchizedek, Abimelech, Jethro, the Magi, Cornelius, etc., that seem to suggest this. I agree with Doug about the evidence being slim. In their contexts, biblical authors usually denounce and rarely credit the truth of other religions (for good reasons, I presume). I acknowledge that religions can be very bad; but the possibility of a religion being helpful in some way cannot be ruled out. Religions are not salvific as systems. Still, they are partly true. God has not left himself without witness and this witness has (presumably) registered in the religious realm. There may be aspects of religions that the Spirit can use in someone's life. Don Richardson, for example, speaks of redemptive bridges and C. S. Lewis speaks of God using parts of a religion in agreement with Christianity. Lewis also wrote in the *Chronicles of Narnia* series of Tash being saved even though he was ignorant of Aslan's claim on him, because Aslan was the one he really sought. It seems plausible to think after this manner and to be watchful for such possibilities in those whom we meet. We must not suspend critical judgment but it does allow us to hope that among non-Christians there are seekers who have found something, if not yet Christ.

I appreciate what Vatican Two said: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions. She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men."<sup>3</sup> I think we should be open to the possibility of God's gracious presence there. I cannot understand why Doug is not open in principle to that possibility. The Spirit of God is

present throughout creation ministering the presence of the divine Suitor. It seems that Doug doubts that it is within the Spirit's power to make positive use of truth components in another religion. Why is he so pessimistic? Why can it not be one of the modalities that God uses? How is it that the darkness always overcomes the light in his view? (Jn 1:5) I cannot grasp why God would bypass the realm of human religion in his seeking of sinners when that realm is the place where so many seek ultimate truth and meaning.

Doug asked about the role which post-mortem experience plays in my inclusivist theory. Here is what I think. After death, we meet God face to face. At that point, the faith in all of us is completed in this encounter. For everyone it will be a great leap forward, both in understanding and love. For an unevangelized person like Job, who was on earth before Christ, this would be a time when his desire for God opens up to a secure and complete picture of the triune God. I assume that persons who had not responded to God in this life would not change their minds and do so then. As for God knowing whether a Job who loved God in life would love him in death, I think he would know what his friend would do in the presence of even more truth and love. Or more adequately, He would know what the beloved would do at the wedding.

**R. DOUGLAS GEIVETT'S  
ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in Daniel B. Clendenin, *Many Gods, Many Lords: Christianity Encounters World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 11.

<sup>2</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 251, 253-254; John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 216 n 1; Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 108-109.

<sup>3</sup> Sanders, "Inclusivism," in *What About Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995) 140.

<sup>4</sup> R. Douglas Geivett, "Is Jesus the Only Way?" in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); and Geivett and W. Gary Phillips, "A Particularist View: An Evidentialist Approach," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 15; Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 98.

<sup>6</sup> Pinnock, "The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions," in *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World: Theology from an Evangelical Perspec-*

*tive*, ed. Dennis L. Ockholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 162.

<sup>7</sup> Pinnock, *Wideness*, 157.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. This conviction comes out most clearly in a passage where Pinnock contrasts his position with Alister McGrath's. He acknowledges that McGrath's position is soteriologically inclusive in the sense that "salvation is possible for non-Christians.... God can bring the unevangelized to faith in this life." But McGrath's position is "exclusive when it comes to other faiths. That is, it differs from inclusivism in its assessment of the role of religion in salvation.... McGrath does not look to religion as a locale of prevenient grace." This is why Pinnock calls McGrath's position "nonrestrictive exclusivism": it is "'nonrestrictive' because of [McGrath's] wider hope and 'exclusivist' because he sees no saving value in other religions." McGrath's position, though it allows "that salvation is possible for non-Christians, that God can bring the unevangelized to faith in this life," is quite clearly considered by Pinnock to be a variety of exclusivism—and this is because the position "sees no saving value in other religions" (Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 187-188).

<sup>9</sup> Pinnock, Foreword to *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, by John Sanders (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) XV.

<sup>10</sup> Pinnock, "Acts 4:12 – No Other Name Under Heaven," in *Through No Fault of Their Own*, ed. William

Crockett and James Sigountos (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 114.

<sup>11</sup> Pinnock, *Wideness*, 93-95; "Finality," 153, 158; *Wideness*, 95-98.

<sup>12</sup> Pinnock seems to regard the cases of Melchizedek and Cornelius as most promising. See Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 109.

<sup>13</sup> Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 188.

<sup>14</sup> Pinnock, *Wideness*, 107, 110.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-68.

<sup>16</sup> See Pinnock "Acts 4:1-12" for this use of the term "eschatological salvation."

<sup>17</sup> Pinnock holds that the truth and goodness discoverable in other religions anticipates salvation through Jesus Christ (Pinnock, *Wideness*, 113). But about the only evidence for this assertion is that people from non-Christian traditions have been known to convert to Christianity. It is hard to see how the inclination to embrace Jesus Christ can be positively inspired by acceptable features of non-Christian religions, except in the case of Judaism.

<sup>18</sup> Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 99. See also his comments on 116 in the same article.

<sup>19</sup> Pinnock, *Wideness*, 112.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>21</sup> Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 116.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Winfried Corduan's article in this issue of *SBJT*.

<sup>23</sup> Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 116.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>25</sup> Pinnock, *Wideness*, 157.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 157-68.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 168; cf. 168-75. See also "Finality of Jesus," 165-167.

<sup>36</sup> Pinnock, "Finality of Jesus Christ," 165. See *Wideness* for intimations of this same attitude.

<sup>37</sup> Pinnock, *Wideness*, 160-61; "Systematic Theology," in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) 121-124; "An Inclusivist View," 144-45.

## CLARK PINNOCK'S ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Anri Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (Pittsburgh: Penn State Univ. Press, 1995) 62-67.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994) 328.

<sup>3</sup> *Vatican Two Statement*, "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," par. 2 in *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Walter M. Abbott, trans. ed. Joseph Gallagher (New York: Herder & Herder, 1966) 662.