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Rob Cook

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## ‘The Sincere Pagan is Sincerely Wrong and Therefore Lost’: A Critique

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*Dr Cook teaches at Redcliffe College, Gloucester. In this article he continues the debate about the fate of those who through no fault of their own have never heard of Christ.*

**Key words:** Theology; inclusivism; sincerity.

### The case stated

Teachers in an evangelical college seem to meet a number of misunderstandings which need to be corrected for each year-group of students. One of these is the assumption that the only alternative to a robust commitment to the damnation of all non-Christians is a sentimental pluralism, which teaches that all religious paths are equally effective. This year was no exception. Yet again I sought to communicate the key distinction between the ontological assertion that had Christ not lived and died and risen again heaven would be empty, and the epistemological contention that one must know and believe this in order to reach heaven. I explained that pluralists would deny both propositions and exclusivists would obviously affirm both. There is however the middle way of the inclusivist who would vigorously endorse the former proposition but have serious reservations about the latter. Exclusivists cannot, therefore, claim a monopoly of loyalty to Christ. Inclusivists also passionately believe that human salvation is completely dependent on Christ's sacrifice but they want to balance this with an equal accent on God's universal love for all humankind. But how, according to the inclusivist, might an unevangelized person enter into a relationship with God?

We finished the course with a student debate between an able exclusivist and an intelligent inclusivist. They disagreed over many things but wholeheartedly agreed over what was to them the manifest fallacy of the contention that God will accept the unevangelized religious person so long as she is sincere. It seemed self-evident to them that in this matter one can be sincere but nevertheless be sincerely and dangerously wrong. Interestingly, it seemed certain to all at the debate that sincerity cannot be enough to acquire a relation-

ship with God.

On consideration, it is not surprising that this assumption is almost foundational to young people whose pastors were educated by reading the theology of authors like Billy Graham and the apologetics of writers like Josh McDowell. Graham called the sufficiency of sincerity argument 'an old cliché' and gives the illustration of a mother who has no milk but in sincerity feeds her baby with available liquids which happen to be Coke and wine. Although the mother is sincere the baby will clearly suffer<sup>1</sup>. McDowell similarly warned that one can be sincerely wrong and provides the example of someone who accidentally shoots a friend after jokingly waving the gun around sincerely believing it to be empty<sup>2</sup>. The students' pastors, and indeed they themselves, might also have read missiological literature such as Dick Dowsett's *God That's not Fair* in which he emphatically makes the same point giving the personal illustration of his brother suffering from a backache as a boy and being prescribed rest and aspirins by the doctor. Their mother insisted on a second opinion and it transpired that the boy had polio. But although the first doctor had been sincere in his diagnosis, 'Sincerity is not enough. One may be sincerely wrong. And the results can be fatal'<sup>3</sup>.

As I listened to the cut-and-thrust of the class debate I realized that as an inclusivist I was no longer satisfied with this position and decided to probe and interrogate it further.

### **Kierkegaard's challenge**

Undeniably it must be true that any-old sincerity will not do. A sincere shopaholic is not likely to impress God, for example. The sincerity in question is obviously about one's attitude to the spiritual realm. Here the usual knockdown argument against those who claim that religious sincerity is enough is to give the example of the sincere Satanist. If any one is damned, surely he must be! But W. Wink helpfully warns against simplistic conclusions, contending that many Satanists and followers of Witchcraft are part of a spiritually adolescent protest movement against a false image of God as, for example, one who is anti-female and anti-physical celebration<sup>4</sup>. It is not necessarily the living God that they hate but an insipid caricature which they have inferred, perhaps, from the media or parents and they

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1 B. Graham, *How to be Born Again* (London, 1977), 48.

2 J. McDowell & D. Stewart, *Answers to Tough Questions* (Buckinghamshire, 1989), 122.

3 D. Dowsett, *God That's not Fair* (Bromley, 1983), 26.

imbue Satan with what are, in fact, divine characteristics such as a passion which affirms human sexuality. A more subtle approach is called for.

Just as our authors in the first section gave priority to correct factual belief over sincere heart attitude, so evangelicalism as a whole has continued to stress the primacy for salvation of belief in sound doctrine. It is worth noting, however, that major twentieth century theological movements placed the emphasis elsewhere on the mode of relationship with the divine Subject who resists final objectification. The accent falls not on the I-It relation of the self to propositional knowledge but on the I-Thou relationship. Examples would include the major existential and neo-orthodox theologians. J. Runzo provides some illustrative quotations:

Karl Barth suggests that 'Religion brings us to the place where we must wait, in order that God may *confront* us,' and Paul Tillich defines revelation as 'the experience in which an ultimate concern *grasps* the human mind.' In the same vein, Rudolf Bultmann talks about God 'confronting us' in a 'demand for decision'. On this view, revelation is not the delivery of truths about God; revelation is the *self*-manifestation of God.<sup>5</sup>

But one must look further back to the nineteenth century to discover the dominant and unifying presence behind much of their thought in the writings of S. Kierkegaard.

Kierkegaard's onslaught was against what he perceived as the complacent, bourgeois Lutheran Church of his day theologically influenced by the presumptuous and pretentious Hegelian metaphysical system. In contrast to the prevailing view of Christianity as a relaxed social ethic coupled with doctrinal adherence, he stressed the agony and loneliness of the individual who sets out, like Abraham, on the risky, costly and uncertain life of faith<sup>6</sup>. For him, the heart of religion is not what he called the objective, which would include philosophical proofs for God's existence and historical conclusions regarding exactly what did or did not happen two thousand years ago, in other words the hunt for doctrinal exactitude and religious facts, but in what he called subjectivity. Subjectivity is about painfully honest self-awareness and passionate commitment to authenticity and Reality. It is about relating with integrity and sincerity, subject with Subject, rather than obsessively seeking clarity and rational certainty about whether and what sort of God exists. One of Kierkegaard's conclusions is surprising but very relevant to our College debate. In *Con-*

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4 W. Wink, *Unmasking the Powers* (Philadelphia, 1986), 38.

5 J. Runzo, *A Short Introduction: Global Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford, 2001), 157.

6 For more on my perspective on Kierkegaard see: R. Cook, 'Soren Kierkegaard: Missionary to Christendom', *EQ* 59 (Oct. 1987), 311-327.

cluding *Unscientific Postscript* he writes, 'if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true'<sup>7</sup>. It looks as if sincerity is enough for Kierkegaard even when one's doctrine is erroneous.

This notion of sincerity needs unpacking, however, and Kierkegaard stresses three salient qualities. The first is fervour. A relationship with God, according to him, is not for the dilettante. For example he writes how, in the depths of frustration as a person seeks God, 'that very instant he has God, not by virtue of any objective deliberation, but by virtue of the infinite passion of inwardness'<sup>8</sup>. The second is moral earnestness: 'freedom is the true wonderful lamp; when a man rubs it with ethical passion, God comes into being for him'<sup>9</sup>. Kierkegaard is quick to add that unlike the power-hungry Aladdin, this encounter results in a spirit of servant hood to the one who is the Lord. God is the ground of moral imperative and the source of all goodness. Which brings us on to the third quality which is an awareness that one is one's own catastrophe and so an ongoing attitude of humility and repentance is appropriate: 'The individual existing human being must feel himself a sinner; not objectively, which is nonsense, but subjectively, which is the most profound suffering'<sup>10</sup>.

For Kierkegaard, this relationship with God is eternal life. Heaven is thus an intrinsic reward like, say, marriage. 'Then you will also have gained that God cannot in all eternity get rid of you, for only in the ethical is your eternal consciousness: behold that is the reward!'<sup>11</sup>. In *Purity of Heart* he warns against the more traditional hope of extrinsic rewards such as palatial celestial mansions. Prudentially to forgo earthly pleasures in the service of God in the hope of such future rewards is base just as 'if a man loves a girl for the sake of her money, who will call him a lover?'<sup>12</sup>. This whole work is a warning against all such double-mindedness following the teaching of the book of James (Jas. 4:8) and a meditation on Jesus' promise that the pure in heart will see God (Mt. 5:8).

As always, Kierkegaard manages to challenge one profoundly and indeed God is clearly concerned to shock the complacent, to enhance our ardour for him and relate to us as ethical and dependant beings but we need to remember that the melancholy Dane was

7 S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton, 1941), 178.

8 *Ibid.*, 179.

9 *Ibid.*, 124.

10 *ibid.*, 201.

11 *Ibid.*, 133-34.

12 S. Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart* (London, 1961), 62.

a rigorist who sometimes missed the gentle heart of God. While Jesus made it clear that God would not rest until his children were entirely sanctified in thought and deed (Mt. 5:48), yet he graciously encouraged the smallest step forward on that long path to holiness; God honours mustard seed faith. Indeed, 'A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out' (Is. 42:3).

### **A contemporary thought-experiment**

The gist of these thoughts must have been swirling around in my unconscious because a homely illustrative story occurred to me during the debate in response to the wholehearted rejection of the efficacy of sincerity by the students. The story is as follows:

I let slip to my family my desire for, say, a green pair of socks. My youngest son notes this and starts saving his pocket money for my birthday in several months time. Unfortunately during this period his memory becomes confused and he mistakenly thinks I want a green tie. He is so excited as he wraps his present and looks forward to that moment of closeness and appreciation when dad opens it in delight. Unfortunately it is a pair of socks that I want. . .

Is the appropriate response, I asked provocatively, for me angrily to express my displeasure at his factual mistake and declare 'you might have been sincere but you are sincerely wrong! Go up to your room!?' Or would not a wise father see beyond the flawed memory and the factual error to what is really significant, namely the loving desire of the child to relate more intimately with his father? And would he not affirm the child and hug him warmly, especially if he discerned that his son had no extrinsic motive such as softening his father up for the imminent request of a new bike but rather desired simply that closer relationship? Surely for God too, sincerity is of paramount importance.

The debate speakers' responses were interesting. The inclusivist said the analogy is flawed because it presupposes the boy is part of the family whereas the question is how one enters God's family. I explained that the analogy could easily be modified to, for example, a sport's hero and a fan that seeks a relationship with him by buying an item that he has heard the hero hanker after at a press conference. . . Alternatively, one might argue that in an important sense every human being *is* a child of God. John Stott, for example, writes:

But we need to remember that God is the Creator of all humankind, and remains infinitely loving, patient and compassionate towards all whom he has made. Yes, and he is also everybody's 'Father', both in the sense that they 'live and move and have their being' in him, deriving the richness of their human life from his generosity (Acts 17:25-28), and in the sense that

he continues to yearn for his lost children, as in the parable of the prodigal son.<sup>13</sup>

The exclusivist felt the analogy was inappropriate in a different way. The sincere pagan seeker is more like a boy who buys green socks but gives them to someone else's father! God has provided us with a mechanism for receiving salvation (belief in Christ) and that's an end to it. All other worship is addressed to false gods!

### **Truth as encounter in modern theology**

The word 'mechanism' is a giveaway. While salvation is envisaged as primarily contingent upon correct knowledge or technique, as an extrinsic prize, it is in danger of lapsing into the sterility of Kierkegaard's objective religion. Indeed this element of exclusivism becomes worryingly reminiscent of the Gnosticism that was rightly rejected by Christendom in the early centuries where salvation was thought to depend on the impartation of some esoteric item of knowledge. Although, in contrast, Christianity is indeed an open secret (Col. 1:26), it is nevertheless in practice still an unknowable and therefore highly esoteric secret for a multitude of human beings who have had no possible access to the Gospel. Certainly one can come up with a sincerely held wrong answer in a quiz show and lose the prize but surely in developing a personal relationship even with someone that one has some wrong factual beliefs about, sincerity is paramount. In fact, sincere and honest interaction *is* the relationship.

As intimated earlier, Kierkegaard was not just a lone voice. He was a seminal influence on subsequent theology. Brunner, for example, writes with some added colouration from Buber,

Truth as encounter is not truth about something, not even truth about something mental, about ideas. Rather, it is that truth which breaks in pieces the impersonal concept of truth and mind, truth that can be expressed *only* in the I-Thou form.<sup>14</sup>

In the theology of religions debate W. Cantwell Smith has championed a similar personalist approach urging the enquirer to ask not what religious ideology does someone espouse (objective) but what is the quality of that individual's religious response (subjective)<sup>15</sup>. Approvingly, C. Pinnock explains this position:

Turning the tables, Smith does not want us to ask which religion a person

13 D. Edwards & J. Stott, *Essentials* (London, 1988), 328.

14 E. Brunner, *Truth as Encounter* (Philadelphia, 1964), 24.

15 W. Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York, 1962).

belongs to, but what religion belongs to that person. This is the distinction between religion as a basic faith response of human beings and religion as a cumulative tradition of culture in which we live our lives.<sup>16</sup>

On the Roman Catholic side, K. Rahner also exemplifies this shift in thinking from the importance of the religious system to the primacy of the personal mode of apprehending or being apprehended by the divine. He writes famously of the anonymous Christian, who is the pagan in a state of grace,

If . . . he has experienced the grace of God – if, in certain circumstances, he has already accepted this grace as the ultimate, unfathomable entelechy of his existence by accepting the immeasurableness of his dying existence as opening out into infinity – then he has already been given revelation in a true sense even before he has been affected by missionary preaching from without.<sup>17</sup>

Rahner's thinking was influential in the formulations of Vatican II which again stress existential orientation and sincerity:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation.<sup>18</sup>

A compound synthesis emerges of a God who looks primarily upon the heart and who draws close to those sincere individuals who respond to his Spirit with a passionate desire for God in some recognition of their own moral poverty and in the desire to live a life of love in fellowship with the One who is Love. J. Runzo helpfully designates this love as 'seraphic' (fiery) being neither just the dispassionate concern of altruistic *agape* nor merely the devoted, passionate love of *eros*<sup>19</sup>. Seraphic love coheres passionate devotion with selfless duty and mirrors God's love which is self-giving, 'jealous' ardour which yet works even-handedly for the well being of all creatures. It is as if through the millennia the great evolutionary process driven by the survival of the fittest prevailed but then God revealed, pre-eminently in Christ, a new law for the development of the earth: that we must love and protect not just our genetic kin, but our enemies too. The imperative must no longer be the love of power but the power of love. 'God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in

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16 C. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids, 1992), 111.

17 K. Rahner, 'Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions' in J. Hick & B. Heblethwaite, *Christianity and Other Religions* (Glasgow, 1980), 75.

18 A. Flannery, ed., *Documents of Vatican II* (Grand Rapids, 1975), 367.

19 J. Runzo, 'Eros and Meaning in Life and Religion' in J. Runzo & N. Martin eds., *The Meaning of Life* (Oxford, 2000), 187-201.



him' (1 Jn. 4:16). This is the last great secret that the universe waited about twelve billion years to learn that contrary to much observation, Love is the source and goal of this cosmos. Fittingly, this is the final thought that Dante leaves his reader as he ends his great poetic trilogy:

Yet, as a wheel moves smoothly, free from jars,  
My will and my desire were turned by love,  
The love that moves the sun and the other stars.<sup>20</sup>

### Biblical corroboration

This paper presupposes without argumentation that inclusivism is a viable evangelical option. I do not need to repeat the work done by evangelical scholars who have demonstrated that this soteriological stance is biblically based<sup>21</sup>. In fact this article is not primarily an exercise in biblical theology but it is important to show that the position here outlined is not without its biblical foundation. Jesus' commendation of purity of heart has already been noted and his warning that repudiation of the Spirit who draws us into a relationship with God is more dire than overt rejection of himself is significant (Mt. 12:30ff). In the book of Acts we discover how God looked upon the passionate and sincere heart of one whose religiosity was actually anti-Christ and Saul was subsequently welcomed into God's Kingdom. Cornelius was from the wrong religion but was loved by God because of his sincere, questing heart leading to Peter's declaration, 'God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right' (Acts. 10:34). The hopeful heart of trust is commended in the book of Hebrews: 'without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him' (Heb. 11:6).

In the Old Testament there are also some interesting texts which are often overlooked when discussing our subject. For example, I wonder how many evangelicals would give Elisha's answer to a convert like Naaman when he asked:

'But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also - when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon,

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20 Dante, *The Divine Comedy 3: Paradise* trans. D. Sayers & B. Reynolds (Middlesex, 1962), 347.

21 E.g. C. Pinnock *op. cit.*; J. Stott *op. cit.* 320-329; N. Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions* (Leicester, 1984) ch. 5; P. Cotterell, *Misison and Meaninglessness* (London, 1990) ch. 6.

may the LORD forgive your servant for this.' 'Go in peace', Elisha said. (2 Ki. 5:18)

Indeed, the Old Testament offers some clear teaching about the kind of people God responds to in fellowship, 'He has showed you, O man, what is good. To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God' (Mi.6:8). And there is the beautiful promise in Psalm 145,

The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.  
The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.  
He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them.

The Lord watches over all who love him. (17-20)

### Sincerity towards the wrong God

Is it possible then to worship the wrong God, or to give green socks to another father as my debating student suggested? Well, strictly speaking the answer must be 'no' since there is only one existent divine being. As philosophers love to point out, no letter (prayer) addressed to God is in danger of going astray since there is only one possible recipient. However, P. Geach has argued,<sup>22</sup> much human worship *has* been completely misdirected. As an example he cites the Pharaoh Akhnaton who mistook the sun for God. But it is so easy to dismiss the worship of others that it is worth pausing a moment to consider Akhnaton a little more closely.

The central question is, was Akhnaton an idolater, worshipping the created order rather than the creator? Or did he view the sun as the great ikon of the invisible God? It is the same question one wants to ask Constantine with his devotion to *sol*. Surely the problem with idolatry is that it restricts the omnipotent and omniscient God to a mere localised object or animal. However, when one reads Akhnaton's great hymn to the Aten (Sun God) in the tomb of Amarna one is struck not only by Aten's life-giving power in nature but also the fact that he created the whole universe and protects even the non-Egyptian peoples. This is not just the god who traverses the sky each day for,

When the chick in the egg speaks in the shell,  
You give him breath within to sustain him.<sup>23</sup>

In many ways the parallels between this hymn and Psalm 104 are

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22 P. Geach, 'The Meaning of God' in M. Warner, *Religion and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1992) 85-90.

23 N. Smart & R. Hecht eds., *Sacred Texts of the World* (London, 1982), 13.

remarkable. In fact Philip Glass follows this song of praise to Aten in his eponymous opera with an offstage chorus singing an extract from the psalm in Hebrew (*Akhmaten*, Act 2, Scene 4).

Geach's cause is therefore not well served by citing *Akhmaten*. Yet Geach is correct in drawing attention to the issue of the accuracy of one's perception of God. The sincerity God seeks is of a certain kind which is to say that it is directed to a certain kind of God in an appropriate spirit. God is personal and the loving source of all that is true, beautiful and good. Theology is therefore an important enterprise. *Fiducia*, faith in (trust), is logically connected to *fides*, faith that (worldview)<sup>24</sup>. Philosophers agree that there is no culturally unmediated religious experience and undoubtedly, certain religious contexts, such as the theistic agnosticism of Therevada Buddhism or the monism of Shankara's Advaita Hinduism, militate against the kind of relationship in which personal fellowship with the divine is a *sine qua non*. Clearly much religious activity in the history of the world has been seriously off target both in terms of its theology and its mode of devotion. So much of religion with its fanaticism, bigotry, idolatry, fertility cults, sacred prostitution, necromancy and magic has been about self-love, the desire for power and the attribution of ultimate value to elements of the created order. This is the path that leads to destruction. Too often deception, cruelty, ugliness, pride, hypocrisy and hardheartedness have been exercised in the name of religion.

Certainly one's *conception* of God may be mistaken in various ways, indeed is almost certain to be wrong in some particulars. But unfortunately Christianity itself is not exempt (1 Pet. 4:17). A colleague of mine has said more than once that what a particular troubled student needs more than anything is a change of God in the sense that the moody, vindictive, unpredictable Father they imagine him to be is crippling their lives. It is not, therefore, a simple matter of worshipping the right or wrong God, the former being the Christian God and the latter being the God other religions happen to worship. Within a religion the conception differs between denominations and traditions – for example, the Calvinist God differs radically from the Arminian, and also differs across time so that, for instance, if we give the vote to our theological ancestors the majority opinion would be that God is immutable and impassible whereas most theologians today would maintain that God empathetically suffers in and with his creation. To complicate matters, it can be argued that there are family resemblances of divine attributes across religions. In significant

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24 For a helpful explication of this point see: H. Netland, *Dissonant Voices* (Grand Rapids, 1991), 128.

ways, it could be demonstrated, the Reformed God has more in common with the sovereign potentate, Allah, than the co-working, interactive God of Process Theism or the nurturing God of feminist theology who promotes the kindom (*sic.*) of God. This must be very disturbing for those who deduce that God requires doctrinal accuracy but encourages those who believe that the Abba that Jesus invited us to share his relationship with remembers that we are dust, that we are fallible children who can be ignorant of or forget exactly what he desires (socks or a tie?) or indeed, exactly who he is (most sons idealize their fathers). What he surely longs to find is a sincere heart reaching out in trust for healing and love that it too might learn to love with the seraphic love of God.

### God's character

Some would object that this is a far too anthropopathic notion of God. Dowsett, for example, writes defending the exclusivist belief that God will damn the unevangelized,

When people in the Old Testament times said they could not conceive of a God who would do this or that, the prophetic reply was: 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah 55.8f). In other words, human hunches do not give us right answers about God. Neither can we learn how God would behave by looking at the way that nice people do things.<sup>25</sup>

The key word in the Isaiah passage is, however, 'higher'. God is *more* loving, forgiving and just than we can dream of, not less. This is, in fact, what we find in the teaching of Jesus. He endorses our deepest moral instincts and stretches them further. For example: yes it is good to love our friends but we must learn to love our enemies also. The *imago dei* doctrine guarantees that our noblest insights and aspirations are to be trusted. Further, God calls us to love him as well as fear him but only the latter response would be possible if our deepest apprehensions of Goodness were subverted in God's nature as would be the case if we had to look to the behaviour of 'nasty people' rather than 'nice people' to discover the mode of divine action. Worship entails discerning God's 'worth-ship'. Much of our ancestors' theology was based on a Hellenistically derived conception of God as the greatest conceivable being but now it is time to rework that approach using post-Freudian psychological insights to present God

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25 D. Dowsett, *op. cit.*, 3-4.

as the most perfectly integrated and individuated being, the converse of the oft-pictured, gigantic, dysfunctional parent, petulant, in constant need of soothing appeasement and savagely vindictive.

A. Fernando explicitly agrees with Dowsett's statement and adds the caution, 'So we must approach these issues humbly, realizing that God has revealed his ways to us in the Scriptures and seeking to align our thinking with God's thinking as revealed in these Scriptures'<sup>26</sup>. Very well. If he and Dowsett are correct, the father in my story must theologically train himself against all his parental convictions and instincts to reject and chastise the little son for his incorrect belief about what his father desires, ignoring as relatively irrelevant the sincerity of the boy's heart. What is worse, as has been noted, the boy is likely to have an incorrect view of his father's character; he is seeking to please the 'wrong' dad. Should the father reject the son's relational overtures until he has acquired a more 'sound' understanding of who his father really is? Presumably. And while he's at it, it might be wise to warn his son of the dangers of reading C. S. Lewis' subversive *Narnia* chronicles. Remember the strangely Kierkegaardian thought in *The Last Battle* when the divine Aslan reassures Emeth who had wrongly but sincerely worshipped the evil Tash with these words,

. . . if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted.<sup>27</sup>

### Conclusion

The exclusivist will clearly continue to oppose the 'old cliché' and endorse the proposition, 'The sincere pagan is sincerely wrong and therefore lost' primarily because the pagan fails to acknowledge, through ignorance, that Jesus died for her sins. The exclusivist must beware, however, of undervaluing the relational element of salvation.

But we who are inclusivists are in severe difficulty if we agree that sincerity is not enough. Just as it is a maxim in ethical theory that 'each person has a moral duty to act as they honestly and sincerely think best, even if those beliefs are in fact mistaken'<sup>28</sup> so we must maintain that sincerity and purity of heart, itself stimulated by God's Spirit, is exactly what God seeks, for 'the eyes of the Lord are on

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26 A. Fernando, *Jesus and the World Religions* (Bromley, 1988), 144.

27 C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (London, 1956), 155.

28 G. Hughes on relativism in R. Varghese ed., *Great Thinkers on Great Questions* (Oxford, 1998), 30.

those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love' (Ps. 33:18). On the basis of Christ's atoning death, God saves those who, responding to his Spirit of love, are drawn to pray with Anselm,

Let me discern Your light whether it be from afar or from the depths. Teach me to seek You, and reveal Yourself to me as I seek, because I can neither seek You if You do not teach me how, nor find You unless You reveal Yourself. Let me seek You in desiring You; let me desire You in seeking You; let me find You in loving You; let me love You in finding You.<sup>29</sup>

### Abstract

This paper challenges the assumption, often canvassed in evangelical circles, that personal sincerity is salvifically insufficient, and argues that those who are inclusivists must reject the assumption. The stress in modern theology on attitude over dogma is traced from Kierkegaard and assessed with some reference to Scripture. The possibility of sincerely worshipping the wrong God is considered with some uncomfortable conclusions for Christians.

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29 Anselm, *Proslogion* (Oxford, 1965), 115

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