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Chester Gillis

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## Evangelical Inclusivism: Progress or Betrayal?<sup>1</sup>

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*This article, as the author himself makes clear, is a comment on the evangelical attitude to interreligious dialogue by a friendly critic; the editor is happy to include it in a journal devoted to the 'defence of the historic Christian faith' in that it is helpful for us to see ourselves as others see us and take their observations seriously. Chester Gillis is the author of A Question of Final Belief: John Hick's Pluralistic Theory of Salvation (Macmillan/St. Martin's, 1989) and Pluralism: A New Paradigm for Theology (Peeters/Eerdmans, 1993). He is Associate Professor of Theology at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.*

### I. Evangelicals on the Move

Sometimes evangelicals lack representation in Christian discussions of interreligious dialogue because main-line and liberal theologians stereotype evangelical theologians as exclusivists or restrictivists<sup>2</sup> in their understanding of salvation. This lack of evangelical representation in dialogues organized by liberal voices in discussions of

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<sup>1</sup> In its original form I presented this paper at the American Academy of Religion 1994 annual meeting in the Evangelical Theology section which was devoted to a dialogue between evangelicals and pluralists. I have substantially revised the paper in the light of the formal responses by Bernard Adeney and Paul Knitter and comments from Clark Pinnock and John Sanders who were present. I am grateful to all of them for their criticisms and clarifications that have made this a more nuanced paper.

<sup>2</sup> John Sanders, in *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), discusses the distinctions between 'exclusivism,' 'universalism,' 'restrictivism,' and 'inclusivism.' Among Christian exclusivists who believe that Christ offers the only valid means of salvation, there are universalists who believe that all will be saved by Christ whether or not they hear or respond to the gospel, restrictivists who believe that only those who hear and respond to the gospel from a human agent before death will be saved and inclusivists who believe that some who have not heard and responded to the gospel nevertheless will be saved by Christ (e.g. because they trusted in a God whom they knew in some other way than through Christ or because of a post mortem second chance to believe).

interreligious importance is neither fair nor justified. As a pluralist, I do not share the views of either conservative or liberal evangelicals, but I am interested in constructive conversation with evangelical theology on the topic of the salvation of the unevangelized.

Controversial voices have arisen from within the ranks of evangelical theologians challenging the hegemony that an exclusivist soteriology has enjoyed to date. In particular, the work of Clark Pinnock and John Sanders has broken new ground among evangelical theologians by rejecting restrictivism and by suggesting that inclusivism is a reasonable and justified theological position. This work presents new options for intra-Christian dialogue in which evangelical theology is no longer excluded, rejected or marginalized outright by the dominant proponents of inclusivism or the liberal (radical) voices advocating pluralism. This recent work opens up avenues for intra-religious dialogue. In this article I will examine this conversation to assess critically the benefits and drawbacks of the move to inclusivism in terms of the larger project of interreligious interchange. This selective reformulation of evangelical soteriology in the light of contemporary religious plurality is significant not only for those within evangelicalism who subscribe to it, but equally important for non-evangelical Christian theologians who attempt to construct Christian soteriologies, often without reference to traditional evangelical theology. To date, there has been a seemingly unbridgeable intra-Christian difference on the question of the fate of the unevangelized. The limited participation by evangelicals (conservative or otherwise) in intra-religious dialogue, and the exclusion of them from interreligious dialogue arranged by pluralist-minded theologians, has plagued the dialogue process itself, and virtually conceded the territory to moderate and liberal theologians representing theologies that, to varying degrees, conflict with evangelical theology.

Yet there is some disagreement among liberal evangelicals as to how widely the contemporary evangelicals hold the restrictivist view. Pinnock unhappily concedes that the majority of evangelicals are hardline restrictivists; that is, they insist on explicit belief in Jesus Christ to be eligible for salvation.<sup>3</sup> However, John Sanders, whose writing has been influenced by Clark Pinnock as evidenced by Pinnock's preface to *No Other Name*, disagrees with Pinnock's assessment and argues that there is no consensus among evangelical

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992) 11.

theologians on the topic.<sup>4</sup> He claims that the impression held by many within and outside of the evangelical community that there is a strict adherence to restrictivism, particularly because of a concern about the effect on missionary activity, is simply not accurate. Whatever the case may be inside the community of evangelical adherents and theologians, the impression to an outsider is that exclusivism or restrictivism rules.

Is the evangelical inclusivist stance progress or betrayal? On the one hand, it will afford the opportunity for conversation on common ground with many main-line theologians; on the other hand, as a fringe element among evangelical theologians, it may so distort the majority evangelical view that it only further fractures the Christian response to religious plurality and thus hinders genuine intra-religious dialogue. Liberal evangelical theologians argue that while the shift from restrictivism to inclusivism is not a necessary move, there are internal—drawing from scripture and evangelical theology—warrants to justify making it. I wish to supplement that argument with external warrants—based on the importance of intra and inter-religious dialogue. Ignoring the claim to revelation that other religions have is increasingly difficult to do in the current theological context of communication between religions. The liberal evangelicals' insistence on the ontological, but not the epistemological, necessity of Christ for salvation preserves the uniqueness of the Christian claim without condemning the unevangelized.

This understanding will foster discussion of soteriology among evangelical theologians and between evangelical theologians and Christian representatives of similar (inclusivist) and other (pluralist) views. It is precisely this conversation that has been lacking, producing a silence that has given rise to misinformation, caricature, and isolation, all problems that genuine dialogue seeks to overcome. Whatever theological differences the potential participants may have, this may be the occasion for them to engage in a fruitful conversation that will benefit all of the participants and Christian theology in its many diverse expressions.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 20. For further data on the percentages of evangelicals who hold a restrictivist view, see James Davison Hunter's *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 35–40, in which he discusses the results of the survey from the Evangelical Academy Project regarding evangelicals' views on salvation.

## II. Evangelicals and Interreligious Dialogue

Often evangelical theologians are excluded from participating in interreligious dialogues that are convened by liberal theologians because the liberal theologians presume that they are not interested in dialogue. In fact evangelical theologians have been involved in interreligious dialogue for quite some time.<sup>5</sup> However, some would admit that they have not always accorded others religions the respect they deserve. Some current evangelical theologians are fostering reflection by evangelical theologians on the subject and method, and encouraging participation in, interreligious dialogue. In particular, Pinnock advocates that evangelical theologians engage in dialogue when he writes: '... we should show respect for other faiths and enter into amicable dialogue with them. Having been negative long enough, it is time to be more appreciative.'<sup>6</sup> Clarifying what is implied in his call for evangelicals to participate in interreligious dialogue, he writes:

Evangelicals are leery of dialogue because they think it means overlooking differences, searching for shallow consensus, avoiding tough issues, and refusing to ask hard questions . . . Evangelical dialogue would be the kind that arises from caring about other people, the willingness to listen respectfully, a preparedness to step into their shoes and try to understand. It would mean clarifying differences where they exist, engaging in serious conversation, and seeking genuine communication. Proper dialogue means going beyond relativism and fideism to talk about the Gospel and the alternative truth claims together.<sup>7</sup>

There are different interpretations of what dialogue, particularly interreligious dialogue, is. While I welcome the openness to interreligious dialogue expressed by some evangelical theologians, most poignantly represented by Pinnock and Sanders, I think that their understanding of dialogue may be challenged on the grounds of consistency and coherency. Pinnock establishes norms for honest and productive dialogue: (1) 'the willingness to appreciate other religions, to honor their truth and to learn from them (2) . . . taking globalization seriously. Systematic theology has to be done globally, in such a way that doctrines are considered within the context of world religions. (3) . . . the stage of dialogue in which critical

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<sup>5</sup> In particular, the work of Stephen Neill, Norman Anderson and Kenneth Cragg attests to the fact that evangelicals have discussed and practiced interreligious dialogue. For an informative history of evangelical participation in dialogue, see Terry C. Muck 'Evangelicals and Interreligious Dialogue,' *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36/4 (December 1993) 517-29.

<sup>6</sup> Pinnock, *A Wideness In God's Mercy*, 110.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

questions are exchanged among the religions.<sup>8</sup> These are admirable norms from which the theological community at large, evangelical and others, can benefit. As Keith Ward reminds us: 'Confessional and comparative theology need not, in all their forms, exclude each other,'<sup>9</sup> implying that theologians have a right to hold positions grounded in particular revelation and upheld by a specific tradition or denomination as long as they are willing to recognize theology as an open-ended discipline in which it may be necessary to revise one's beliefs when further evidence and argument warrants it. Ward puts it clearly when he writes: 'I have no wish to expel the confessional theologian from the academic community; but such a person must accept that a more pluralist and revisionist form of theology also exists; and should, I think, accept that it is a positively good thing to engage in this wider theological enterprise, even for those whose own commitment is settled.'<sup>10</sup>

However, the conception of dialogue espoused by Pinnock is not identical with dialogue as described by others, such as Leonard Swidler, Raimundo Panikkar, Stanley Samartha, Paul Knitter, David Tracy, or Robert Neville to name some prominent voices.<sup>11</sup> According to these theologians, dialogue should not be an instrument for proselytization. Yet, in Pinnock's view, dialogue is in service to missions.<sup>12</sup> Using Paul as his model, Pinnock recommends dialogue with other religions as a tool of the missionary dimension of Christianity. He writes: 'If we hold the Apostle in high esteem, we

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 139–41.

<sup>9</sup> Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1994) 49.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>11</sup> Admittedly, these theologians represent a different view from that of evangelical theology. However, each is a respected and influential voice in the larger theological conversation. For discussions of dialogue in their work see, Swidler 'The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue,' *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20:1 (Winter 1983) 1–4; 'Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue: The Matrix of All Systematic Reflection Today,' in *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion* ed. by L. Swidler (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987) 5–50; Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1978); Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1982); Knitter, *No Other Name?*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985) 205–31; Tracy, *Dialogue With the Other* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Neville, *Behind the Masks of God* (Albany: SUNY, 1991) 163–69.

<sup>12</sup> In fairness to Pinnock, his missionary emphasis is, to some degree, a consequence of his evangelical audience. Were he to neglect the proselytizing mandate so central to an evangelical understanding of Christianity, it is likely that his credibility among evangelicals would suffer significantly and his attempt to examine the possibility of an inclusivist position may be ignored by the very community of evangelicals he addresses.

must take seriously interreligious dialogue as part of *the strategy of missions*. Paul was prepared to begin conversation with people to see where it would lead. In dialogue, he was ready to move to their territory, to their comfort zones, *to preach Christ to them*.<sup>13</sup> (emphasis mine)

Pinnock considers himself a 'true pluralist' because he respects differences in religions. But pluralists also respect genuine differences. It is a caricature of the pluralist position to allege that all pluralists are syncretists or to suppose that pluralists do not permit religions to make claims. Admittedly, pluralists have differing versions of pluralism, but all agree that dialogue is not a vehicle for proselytization. If dialogue is to be a truth-seeking adventure, let it be just that. Despite the fact that he describes the other religions as 'alternative truth claims,' with his missionary focus, Pinnock could be interpreted to be claiming that Christianity possesses the real truth and that dialogue is the contemporary means by which to impart that truth to others. His earlier work assures the reader that Pinnock is not a fideist. He wrote in the preface to *Reason Enough*: 'I take the question of truth very seriously. I do not believe that we have to commit ourselves [to Christianity] without reasonable grounds.'<sup>14</sup> For Pinnock, there is sufficient evidence and reason, derived from scripture and the Christian tradition, to warrant belief in Christ. He defends the reasonableness of faith based on the following arguments and evidence: pragmatic consideration, experiential dimension of faith, metaphysical basis, historical evidence, and the community dimension of Christianity. Aware of the checkered history of arguments for the existence of God, Pinnock does not argue for a rational proof of God's existence but for a reasonable probability of such.

Many religions make truth claims, and each in accord with its insight, revelation, prophecy or enlightenment is entitled to do so. However, this does not necessarily mean that what they believe is true. Dialogue is the very process that challenges those claims to truth by counter-claims, additional evidence, different perspectives, and other hermeneutics. Through the dialogue process it is possible (or it should be a foundational methodological principle for the dialogue) that one's understanding of the truth may change. This includes Christian participants in dialogue. They too must be open to the possibility that their beliefs will be altered by the dialogue process. Pinnock is open to such a possibility if the arguments and

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<sup>13</sup> Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 131.

<sup>14</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Reason Enough: A Case for the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1980) 10.

evidence produced by the dialogue process convinced him either that Christian belief was in error, or, concurrently, that another religious belief is more probable.

The difficulty arises not with Pinnock's defense of Christian belief but with his position in relation to the status of interreligious dialogue. It is problematic that Pinnock views dialogue as a component of missiology. 'Indeed, an attitude that is positive and respectful toward people of other faiths will make it easier to share our conviction about Jesus with them. It can enhance missions, rather than threaten them, by building a bridge of goodwill between us. . . . God is not finished with the world religions. They are dynamic, historical realities that are constantly changing. Who is to say that God is unable to work from within as well as from without in order to open up people to God's saving love revealed in Jesus Christ?'<sup>15</sup> Here Pinnock is articulating the kind of inclusivism that is familiar to main-line Protestant and Catholic theologians and which has been adopted by and large by the churches as the endorsed theology. Explicitly, this theology proffers the notion that the revelation of God is available not only within the salvation history of Christianity but also in other religions and even to persons outside the framework of religion. However, while this revelation affords knowledge of God, it is inadequate for salvation since salvation is available only through Christ.

Further, Pinnock sees interreligious dialogue as an opportunity for religions to join forces in the battle against unbelief. Interreligious dialogue should not be a masked attempt to fend off secularism or what Pinnock describes as relativism, and in Pinnock's case relativism is equated with secularism.<sup>16</sup> He writes: 'Against secularism, Buddhism is our ally.'<sup>17</sup> I agree with Raimundo Panikkar's directive that dialogue be free from general apologetics, that is, it is not intended to be an alliance of religions to oppose would-be adversaries such as humanism or secularism. Those who conceive of dialogue partners as allies in the battle against modernity, or the secular expression of it, are missing the point. Dialogue should be an encounter and exchange between religious persons about their religious beliefs and theological claims, not an attack on those who do not share their fundamental religious convictions about the world and humanity's role vis-a-vis a transcendent dimension. Dialogue

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<sup>15</sup> Clark Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way Through Modern Theology From an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990) 163.

<sup>16</sup> ' . . . Relativism does not lead to genuine conversation, but to a new type of intolerance toward all those who take truth seriously. It is secularism in disguise . . . ' *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 136.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

should not be constructed or conducted to impede the encroachment of secularism.

Dialogue that is so conceived may not achieve the anticipated result. It may forge unholy alliances between religions (to oppose secularism) that otherwise have fundamental disagreements in doctrine, ethics or polity issues. Co-opting the dialogue process in order to press a religious agenda in reaction to a secular world presumes that the other has the same or a similar agenda, which may or may not be the case. It denies the autonomy and self-definition necessary for the other to function as an equal in the dialogue. How religions consider secularity also varies. Some may not be threatened by it while others are. They may interpret it in far less threatening ways than Pinnock interprets it. It is important that the religions themselves determine their disposition toward modernity. Entering dialogue with the presumption that there will be agreement to oppose secularism may violate another principle of dialogue which, negatively expressed, is not to stipulate matters of accord or disagreement in advance of the dialogue itself. In so doing, one sets an agenda that may restrict the dialogue to particular issues or concerns confining the dialogue to specific issues and objectives via artificial parameters that address some issues but preclude others. The dialogue process itself should serve as the vehicle by which points of accord and difference are identified.<sup>18</sup>

Having said this, I do not mean to imply that religious persons from different traditions should not stand together in opposition to what Tillich called 'the demonic' or what we might call 'intolerables' meaning, for example, social or political conditions that oppress the poor and the marginalized.<sup>19</sup> Religions can have common enemies in the form of evils (of whatever type or source) that denigrate or eviscerate human life. One element of the interreligious encounter can be the galvanizing of different religious traditions to oppose such enemies. Ethical issues may well provide a common denominator from which to engage in fruitful far-reaching dialogue on issues of doctrine, tradition, religious practice and so forth. At the same time, I am aware that even where there is agreement on formal ethical norms of the type 'Persons should not be oppressed,' there may be

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<sup>18</sup> As Bernard Adeney has reminded me, soteriology is not the only thing that matters in dialogue. Often Christian theologians (of all types and persuasions) focus on soteriology as *the* issue of interreligious dialogue when in fact there are many areas that could be the focus of common exploration; among these, but not confined to them, are unmasked curiosity, spirituality, moral commitments, friendship, mutual interest in survival, and the influence of religion on politics.

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted especially to Paul Knitter for bringing this dimension of interreligious dialogue to my attention.

disagreements about the material nature of these norms that leads to further questions such as 'What constitutes oppression in this culture, time and place?' Concrete practices are not always easily agreed upon and themselves may become subject matter for the dialogue.

### **III. The New Breed of Evangelical Inclusivism**

Evangelical inclusivism is a recent phenomenon. There are many evangelicals who would say that it is not a legitimate evangelical theology but an aberration to be resisted and denounced as inconsistent with the bible. These conservative voices notwithstanding, some evangelical theologians are putting their own stamp on a soteriological theory of inclusivism. They are breaking ranks with the majority view within their community, in much the same way that pluralists are breaking ranks with mainline Christian theologians on the identical issue of soteriology. Both have further theological implications in areas such as christology, ecclesiology and doctrine of God. This evangelical variety of inclusivism adopts some of the existing core of arguments for inclusivism, marshaled by moderate and progressive theologians, and rejects other elements. In some respects, these evangelical theologians are catching up with the larger Christian theological community, as Pinnock concedes:

There is a definite theological movement among the evangelicals. They are engaged in redrawing some of the boundaries and reshaping part of their identity. This shocks many who did not think such boundaries ought to change or need to change. And it is creating a lot more diversity and uncertainty among them. What does it mean? For one thing it means that new theological thinking is happening among those who have recently been moving out of the fundamentalist ghetto. Some of the rougher edges are being sanded off and a higher degree of conformity to the cognitive assumptions of the larger culture is being permitted. Evangelicals are now beginning to wrestle with the dialectic of identity and relevance just as liberals had to do much earlier.<sup>20</sup>

This assessment is confirmed by sociologist James Davison Hunter in his work *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*.

Evangelical theology at all levels of sophistication has been advancing (albeit slowly) out of its ghetto and correspondingly has gained a measure of legitimacy. . . . Certainly, in its move out of its ghetto, it has risked the unintentional contamination by the very reality it has tried to keep out. That this process has begun, there is little doubt. Where it will

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<sup>20</sup> Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze*, 68.

go from here is an open question. If historical precedent is instructive, it becomes clear that these tendencies will probably escalate.<sup>21</sup>

In other respects, evangelical theologians, even the liberal variety being described here, maintain the distinct character of evangelicalism and do not uncritically appropriate all varieties of inclusivism. While Pinnock heralds Vatican II and cites several recent Catholic theologians approvingly, for example, Rahner's assessment of Augustine on the question of the fate of the unevangelized, the so-called *massa damnata*, and Danielou's treatment of pagans as holy, at times sounding more Roman Catholic than evangelical Protestant, still he refutes certain theories arising from Catholic thinkers, such as Rahner's optimism about the role religions play in salvation or Kung's [via Schlette] distinction between ordinary and extraordinary means of salvation. It is a particular brand of inclusivism they espouse, accepting some elements of the main-line versions and rejecting others. Sometimes it seems as if they are attempting to carve out an 'evangelical inclusivism' that will both distinguish them from main-line Catholics and Protestants and continue to endear them to evangelicalism.

#### IV. The Challenge to Inclusivism

In his book *No Other Name*, John Sanders claims that: 'Radical pluralists such as Paul Knitter and John Hick argue that conservative Christians cannot produce anything but fruitless speculations regarding the unevangelized or assertions that their destiny is simply unknown.'<sup>22</sup> With his detailed defense of inclusivism, Sanders has proven otherwise.<sup>23</sup> However, in my view, inclusivism, even in its evangelical formulation, remains a form of Christian imperialism. Sanders further charges that pluralists, in this instance Paul Knitter in particular, have surrendered the central claims of Christianity for an accommodating pluralism (charges I believe to be inaccurate). Pluralists have reinterpreted the tradition, granted sometimes in radical ways, but, in their view, this is neither surrendering the claims of the tradition, nor denying the necessity for or validity of tradition.

In his urbane but straitforward way, John Hick, now the enemy of evangelical theologians, yet himself a former evangelical Christian,

<sup>21</sup> Hunter, *Evangelicalism*, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Sanders, *No Other Name*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> See also John Sanders, 'Evangelical Responses to Salvation Outside the Church,' *Christian Scholar's Review* 24:1 (September 1994) 45-58, which details his distinction between 'restrictivism' and 'inclusivism.'

says it well: 'But I think it worthwhile to say that the fundamentalist wing within Christianity does serve an important purpose. Fundamentalism, or extreme conservative evangelicalism, can be an important phase through which to pass, though not a good one in which to get stuck.'<sup>24</sup>

Are the liberal evangelicals passing through a phase, that is, inclusivism, or are they getting stuck? I think the answer is evident that they are both passing through a phase *and* getting stuck. They are, happily in my view, taking leave of traditional evangelicalism since they find it too constricting with regard to the notion of salvation, and theologically hostage to ideologically conservative voices. However, they have severed (or severely modified) their identification with conservative evangelicalism, at least on the issue of soteriology, in order to join the crowded ranks of moderates from many theological camps who endorse an inclusivism that attempts to have it both ways: yes, persons who are not explicitly Christian are saved; no, their religion is not the equal of Christianity and is only completed by Christ's salvific act. The move to inclusivism by this minority of evangelical theologians can be heralded as progress by those who have longed to welcome evangelicals to a wider theological conversation.

While the move from restrictivism to inclusivism may be considered radical by members of the evangelical establishment, the real radical move is the move from inclusivism to pluralism, a move that has been made only recently by a minority of Christian theologians. Those who have articulated or embraced theological theories of pluralism are just as pressed to defend their positions as are conservative evangelical theologians to defend restrictivism or liberal evangelical theologians to defend the version of inclusivism described here. Clearly, no evangelical theologian, not even the progressive ones described in this paper, is on the verge of embracing a pluralism that radically relativizes the Christian theological claims about soteriology or christology. The move from restrictivism to a version of inclusivism, while it softens the epistemological necessity for all persons to consciously acknowledge that Christ is the savior, leaves in tact the claim for the ontological necessity of Christ for salvation. Thus, it also preserves the belief that all salvation emanates from Christ, making all religions soteriologically dependent upon Christ. In effect, this means that Christianity retains its claim to superiority in a world of multiple religions. In this evangelical form of inclusivism, the thought that salvation through Christ is available to all, regardless of explicit conversion, is

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<sup>24</sup> John Hick, 'A Liberal Christian View,' *Free Inquiry* (Fall 1985).

consoling to Christians who are uneasy with the condemnation of so many implied in the theory of restrictivism. However, in the context of interreligious dialogue, it may appear to be a way to assuage the consciences of Christians rather than an invitation to treat other religions equally.

### **Abstract**

Controversial voices have arisen from within the ranks of evangelical theologians challenging the hegemony that an exclusivist soteriology has enjoyed to date. In particular, the work of Clark Pinnock and John Sanders has broken new ground among evangelical theologians by suggesting that inclusivism is a reasonable and justified theological position. This work presents new options for intra-Christian dialogue in which evangelical theology is no longer excluded, rejected or marginalized outright by the dominant proponents of inclusivism or the liberal (radical) voices advocating pluralism. This selective reformulation of evangelical soteriology in the light of contemporary religious plurality is significant not only for those within evangelicalism who subscribe to it, but equally important for non-evangelical Christian theologians who attempt to construct Christian soteriologies, often without any reference to evangelical theology. This article assesses critically the benefits and drawbacks of this move to inclusivism in terms of the larger project of interreligious interchange.

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