

Soteriological Inclusivism

Soteriological inclusivism is a more moderate version of exclusivism. This position answers the epistemic question in the same manner as strict exclusivism, but is more moderate according to its response to the soteriological question. Like strict exclusivism, it admits of one and only absolutely true religion. It is the only one that gets all of the facts right. But other religions are good too, and faithful adherents of those other religions will nonetheless make progress with respect to salvation despite their false belief with regard to philosophical and doctrinal matters. Inclusivism is the position of Dalai Lama as encountered in the required reading for this module, as well as the dominant post-Vatican II position within Roman Catholicism. And though these two soteriological inclusivism are each very different from one another, they are nonetheless fundamentally the same with respect to how they approach the problem of diversity.

Soteriological Inclusivism – Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama's position can be referred to as the no hurry approach. According to the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, each one of us have lived a great number of lives and will continue to live a great number of lives until, eventually, we are released from the wheel of birth and rebirth and enter into Nirvana. Only Buddhists can ultimately achieve final Nirvana because only Buddhism is absolutely true. But good Christians, good Muslims all other faithful religious practitioners will nonetheless make progress along the path toward Nirvana in this present life as a result of the faithful practice of their respective religions. It is far better for individuals to remain within whatever religion most suits their unique personality and tastes, even if it is, strictly speaking, a false religion. Converting mid ship is most likely to make overall progress much slower than if they have to start over at the bottom by switching into a religion that does not suit their needs.

Soteriological Inclusivism – Vatican II

It is safe to say that the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, who was one of the foremost influences with respect to Vatican II, was also one of the most ardent and explicit defenders of soteriological inclusivism the Western world has ever known. According to Rahner, Christianity is in fact the one and only true religion and the core teachings of the Church are more or less literally and absolutely true to the exclusion of all other faiths. But God is gracious, and accordingly, good Muslims, good Hindus and Buddhists and so on, can and will be saved by God through the grace of Jesus Christ. They will be saved even if they are unaware of his atoning work on the cross and they do not know him by name, making them so-called anonymous Christians.

Cremet, Letizia Mancino. Karl Rahner. 2011. Wikimedia Commons. Web. 25 Jun. 2013. <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Karl_Rahner_by_Letizia_Mancino_Cremet.jpg>.

Religious Pluralism

A third possible response to the problem of religious diversity is religious pluralism. This is the position argued by philosopher John Hick.

Religious pluralism is the view that, more or less, all contemporary religions are roughly equal as various different responses to one and the same ultimate reality. Hick refers to this most fundamental and divine ultimate reality as "the Real." Within Christianity, the Real is experienced as God the Trinity. Within Islam it is experienced as Allah. Within Hinduism the Real is interpreted as Brahman. And so on.

According to Hick's position, no one of these various responses to the Real is absolutely perfect, and accordingly, no one religion is absolutely true. But nearly all modern religions are paths toward the Real, and hence equally capable of salvation.