

Religious Pluralism

Introduction

Universalism – The idea that everyone will be saved regardless of what they do or believe.

Universalists make the following arguments:

1. God's love is incompatible with people going to hell.
2. God's power is sufficient to restore lost humanity.
3. God desires all people to be saved.
4. People in heaven would be sad if their loved ones were damned.
5. Christian exclusivism is intolerant.
6. It is the only way to make sense of worldwide suffering.

Religious Pluralism - People can be saved through other religions outside of Christianity. All (or most) spiritual paths lead to the same goal.

People feeling the elephant.

Inclusivism – People outside of Christianity can be saved, but they are still saved by Christ. They do not have to have conscious knowledge about Jesus or even orthodox doctrine. A Muslim, for example, is saved by Christ even though he doesn't know that is the God he is subconsciously trusting.

“...a person who becomes the object of the Church's missionary efforts is or may be already someone on the way towards his salvation, and someone who in certain circumstances finds it, without being reached by the proclamation of the Church's message – and if it is at the same time true that this salvation which reaches him in this way is Christ's salvation, since there is no other salvation – then it must be possible to be not only an anonymous theist but also an anonymous Christian.” – Karl Rahner

Rob Bell held a form of inclusivism.

Some passages they will use:

Romans 11:32 - For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

1 Timothy 2:4 - [God]...desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

John 12:32 - And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

Colossians 1:20 - and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

(Note: Those who critique limited atonement for saying that the word "all" has to be limited in some sense do the same thing when fighting the universalist)

John Hick

“John Hick (1922-2012) – Believes that the various world faiths embody different views of Ultimate Reality and thus provide different ways to attain what is called ‘salvation’ in some religions and ‘liberation’ or ‘enlightenment’ or ‘fulfillment’ in others. To those who object, insisting that Christianity is unique because it was founded by God incarnate in Jesus, Hick replies that God can act through many individuals who are open to God. For Hick, then, Jesus was not uniquely divine but was merely one of many such persons. To those who point out that the different religions provide incompatible descriptions of Reality, he responds that each tradition believes that Reality exceeds our creaturely understanding. Hick explains that each person experiences Reality as it appears to him in his unique cultural situation. In other words, each religious tradition conditions its adherents’ understanding of Reality and provides authentic and appropriate ways for them to respond to it.” –Michael Peterson

Problems with Religious Pluralism

1. The Bible teaches there is only one way to be saved – through Christ

The evidence is overwhelming:

Acts 4:11–12 - This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

1 Timothy 2:5 - For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

John 3:18 - Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

John 14:6 - Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 3:36 - Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 8:24 - I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins.”

John 3:3 - Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

1 John 5:12 - Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

1 John 2:23 - No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.

2 John 9 - Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

Matthew 10:32–33 - So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Revelation 13:8 - and all who dwell on earth will worship it [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

Romans 10:14–15 - How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?...

2. Pluralism doesn't actually value each religion but rather destroys each religion's most important claims.

It doesn't actually show that all religions are right but that all religions are wrong. It is the least tolerant view one can hold.

3. Pluralism is a contradiction.

It claims to be the only worldview that is actually right while denying that there is only one worldview that is actually right.

4. Pluralism doesn't define what the “Real” is that each religion is trying to reach.

“[The “Real”] is infinite, eternal, limitlessly rich beyond the scope of our finite conceiving or experiencing.” –John Hick

But in many religions the “Real” is not infinite (like the “gods” of Greek mythology), and it is not beyond our experience (as in Hinduism).

Is there one God or many?

Which actions are good and which are bad?

Is reincarnation or resurrection true?

Is there no justice for those who are evil?

What about religions that believe in logical contradictions? (In this case the “Real” would also *not* be the “Real” at the same time)

5. Pluralism doesn't explain how non-theistic worldviews work.

6. If no religion can know the “Real” then how do we even know that there is a “Real” at all?

Further Clarifications

1. Notice that the biblical passages above show that you are only saved by Christ (and no other way).
2. Against “inclusivism,” notice that the biblical passages above say that you have to have *conscious faith* in Christ to be saved.
3. What about babies or those who have a mental handicap?
4. What should we think about those who have never had a chance to hear the gospel?
5. How were people in the Old Testament saved if the Son hadn't become incarnate yet?
6. Is it arrogant for Christians to claim to have the only way to salvation?
7. Do we need to have each religion be equal to be able to get along and dialog with one another?
8. How should we respond to those who say that, since there are so many religions, we cannot know which one is right?

Example of math problems

9. Those who are pluralistic have a tendency to also deny absolute truth.
10. We, as Christians, are exclusivistic. We are not tolerant of everything.
11. How should we respond to those who say that, had you been born in another country (say India), you would have been Hindu instead of Christian?

“Suppose we concede that if I had been born of Muslim parents in Morocco rather than Christian parents in Michigan, my beliefs would be quite different. [But] the same goes for the pluralist...If the pluralist had been born in [Morocco] he probably wouldn't be a pluralist. Does it follow that...his pluralist beliefs are produced in him by an unreliable belief-producing process?” -Alvin Plantinga