Three Views On Salvation

The world is a big place, with a vast array of beliefs. As you study the world religions of today you start to wonder if there is one true religion, or are some right, or are they all right? In the Christian religion today, there is that exact same question floating around. The book *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* address this issue by discussing three different views. Some people called pluralist claim they are all valid ways of obtaining salvation. Inclusivist believe that Christianity is the best way, but some other religions do contain salvation potential. While still other, called particularist, believe that only salvation through Jesus Christ (Christianity) is the one true religion. In this essay I will argue that a broad particularist is the truly Christian understanding of salvation. While all the views do have some good points, but after all the reading I feel that particularist have the most solid case. The other two have major weak points that in the following paragraphs I will discuss.

Pluralism is the first view that we run into in our book. This section of the book is written by John Hick. As Hick tries hard to prove his claim that pluralism is the true Christian view, I however find his argument lacking and contradicting itself. One of the first claims is that the Bible is not historically accurate, and not a true source for the Christian faith. Hick supports this by saying, “[The Gospels] were written between forty and seventy years after Jesus’ death by people who were not personally present at the events they describe; for all are dependent on sources in a way in which an eyewitness
would not be” (34-35). The first problem I see with that claim is that the belief in the Bible, and the belief that every word in the Bible is God inspired is a core belief to the Christian faith. Throughout the whole book Hick claims to be a Christian, but how can you claim to be something if you do not believe in one of the core essentials to the Christian faith? If Hick does not believe in the Bible the rest of his argument seems pointless because he has just proven that in order to become a pluralist you must give up some of your central beliefs in Christianity.

The second problem I see with Hick’s claim of the Bible not being valid is that in two paragraphs above Hick contradicts his claim. Hick states, “God is always and everywhere present to us- above, beneath, around, and within us. And when a human being is exceptionally open to the divine presence, he or she has a vivid awareness of God, which is then called a revelation” (34). As a Christian that Hick claims to be, then with this definition of what it takes to receive revelation from God, would not you then believe that the authors of the Gospels had this “vivid awareness” and everything they wrote was a true revelation of God. He also points out that God is everywhere, but if God is everywhere would not you conclude that if he is everywhere, then he would have known that these writing were going to be the central belief to the Christian faith, and make sure they are accurate. Hick seems to be unstable in his view of God. One minute he is everywhere, and the next God allows all these false writings about him be the central faith to Christianity.

In Hick’s section about pluralism he refers to God as the Real. As I already pointed out about some of vagueness Hick refers to about the Real as he tries to further explain the Real his claim gets weaker. Hick states, “We cannot attribute to the Real a se
any intrinsic attributes, such as being personal or no personal, good or evil, purposive or no purposive, substance or process, even one or many, though the limitations of our language compel us to speak of it in the singular rather than the plural….Our systems of human concepts cannot encompass the ultimately Real. It is only as humanly thought and experienced that the Real fits into our human categories” (50). In this definition of the Real, Hick seems to be suggesting that everything is the Real, since we cannot put a finger on what is the Real, then everything must be it. According to Hick then, the atheists must be part of the Real, devil worshipers must be part of the Real. If we have no humanly possible way to distinguish any traits of the Real, than we have nothing to concluded than that of everything is the Real. This thought is very contradicting to the Christian faith as we see God as loving, fair, just, etc. Yes, we do not fully understand who God is, but we do have some sort of knowledge about him.

So far we have discussed that Hick wants us to change our view on the Bible and our view of God, Hick also presents we change our views on salvation, to fully understand that Christianity can be pluralistic. Hick says, “If we define salvation as being forgiven and accepted by God because of Jesus’ death on the cross, then it becomes a tautology that Christianity alone knows and is able to preach the source of salvation. But if we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation form natural self-centeredness to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifested in the “fruit of the Spirit,” then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions- and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent” (43). My first question to Hick is, if we can know nothing about God then how can we think that changing to an “orientation centered in God” is possible. Beyond that
contradiction we also see that Hick radically rebukes the Christian claim that Jesus is the way. Once again I cannot see how Hick calls himself a Christian, he sounds more like a Hindu than anything else.

To further prove my point of Hick’s false claim to be a Christian, Hick goes on and tries to show us Jesus is not the way, “Here incarnation is a metaphor as in ‘Abraham Lincoln incarnated the spirit of American independence’ … Thus on one hand, the idea of Jesus being God incarnate has no acceptable literal meaning, or at least none that has yet been discovered. On the other hand, it does have a powerful metaphorical meaning, in that Jesus was so open to divine inspiration, so responsive to the divine spirit, so obedient to God’s will, that God was able to act on earth in and through him” (57-58). Hick reduces Jesus down to a good example for us to follow. Clearly here Hick has declared himself to not be a Christian. Even our name, Christians, spouts Christ in it. The core belief of a Christian is that Jesus died on the cross for us. As Hick may have an argument of pluralism, but please do not try to tell me you are a Christian, almost everything Hick tried to proved is anti-Christian.

The next view on salvation, inclusivism, written by Clark Pinnock, has a much stronger appeal to the Christian faith, however I still do see some down falls. Pinnock defines that inclusivism believes that, “because God is present in the whole world, God’s grace is also at work in some way among all people, possibly even in the sphere of religious life. It entertains the possibility that religion may play a role in the salvation of the human race, a role preparatory to the gospel of Christ, in whom alone fullness of salvation is found” (98). Pinnock’s definition seems fair and even appealing in some aspects. Yes I do believe that God is present and working in the whole world, I feel that
God is constantly trying to condition our hearts to receive the grace that Jesus provided for us. Where I see a down fall in Pinnock’s argument throughout the chapter is his thought that salvation if found in the grace that Jesus’ supplied, but you can receive that grace and not know it is through Jesus. I believe Pinnock would argue that because of people’s culture they may not be aware of Jesus and when he comes to them, they accept the grace He has given them without knowing why, how, or who. Where I disagree is how can you accept something you do not understand. You cannot fully implement the grace and works of Jesus in your life if you do not fully understand that which has been given to you.

Another point Pinnock brings to the table is that Jesus died for the undeserving sinners like ourselves and others in other religions. Because of who Jesus was, love, we all can receive his grace (103). Pinnock draws in many scripture verses to back up his argument. Pinnock’s claim is absolutely true. Jesus did die on the cross so that all have the opportunity of salvation. That is the central belief of Christianity, that is why we have so many missionaries around the world to teach this good news.

What then is the problem, you may be thinking. The problem I see is not in this statement but in the ideas that follow. Inclusivist believe that Jesus is present in some way in all morally good religions, and in order to receive the grace that Jesus has provided you do not need to confess Jesus, you just need to internally receive his grace and keep on practicing your own religion. However, I feel that if you truly receive this grace that Jesus has provided for all, you cannot go back and practice your other religions. Many religions worship other gods, and seek self-revelation for enlightenment. These concepts go totally against what God wants. He said himself that he is a jealous
God and will not share his people. Once you receive Jesus salvation you are one of his people and he will not share you. The reason Jesus came to this earth to give us salvation is because we as human beings could not be good enough on our own to reach salvation. Once you receive Jesus you realize that and put your hope in him. If inclusivist say that you can receive Jesus but keep practicing your own religion, then how do you turn your reliance on Jesus, instead of yourself if your religion practices self-revelation.

Pinnock uses the story of Cornelius in the bible to prove that God works outside the Christian church (109). As Cornelius’s story does prove that Jesus did die for all, (which we already established as key to the Christian faith) it does not however, prove that once you receive Jesus you can continue in your original religion and still receive salvation as inclusivist claim. Cornelius was a gentile that Peter told the good news of Jesus to, and Cornelius convert to Christianity and followed the teachings of Jesus. If anything the story of Cornelius disproves the inclusivist view, for once Cornelius received Jesus he no longer could live his life the same way and practice the same things, no his life lined up with Jesus Christ.

Now that we have ruled out pluralism and inclusivism as the true understanding of salvation in the Christian religion, we have particularism to defend as the correct view on salvation. As I stated in the begin that I believe in a broad view of particularism as the correct view of salvation in the Christian faith. The reason I believe in the broad view instead of the narrow view is because the narrow view to me sounds to be proclaiming you can only receive Jesus in a church setting. However, I believe that people receive Jesus in their hearts in many different ways, than just those outlined in a church. However, I do believe that no matter what way they receive Jesus, you know it is Jesus’
They start out their section trying to prove that we can find things out about God by looking around us. In their attempt they were trying to convince Hick that if we kick out the Bible as a creditable source, we still can see attributes of God in the world around us called natural theology (216). As Geivett/Phillips do bring up some interesting points about the world around us, and how the world is made just right to sustain human life (223), I do however find it pointless. To me as defending particularist, I think Geivett/Phillips time would have been better served showing Hick why belief in the Bible as a creditable source is vital to calling yourself a Christian, and showing how natural theology does fit with what the Bible suggest.

Thankfully the rest of Geivett/Phillips argument was sound in my mind. Geivett/Phillips go on to prove that the Bible is a particularist document, and explicit faith in Jesus Christ is how you receive salvation. They use evidence as Acts 4:12, John 3:16 etc, to prove this (230-238). Acts 4:12 states, “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” Clearly this statement rebukes the inclusivist view that you can receive Jesus in your heart but still be worshiping foreign gods. Once you have an encounter of Jesus’ presence you can only praise that name which has given you the freedom!

Many inclusivist and pluralist refuse to believe this truth because with this understanding of God and salvation many will perish into hell. I am not here to argue that is not true. Sadly many will perish, and have no hope. You may be wondering why such a loving God would do such a thing? It is simple, we as Christian’s believe in
God’s overruling power, we also believe in God as a just God. God will not send anyone to hell unjustifiably. God has given us all the power to choose and some choose life and some choose death. Many argue what about those who never heard the word Jesus spoken to them, how can a fair and just God send them to hell. There are two responses to this question. Cornelius never heard of Jesus before, but when God came to him he knew it was of God and sought out the truth, and the Bible says if you seek you shall find. God comes to all people, some seek the truth and some ignore his presence.

Secondly, as God says in this word he will punish sin to the fourth generation. As hard as it is to swallow you may not receive Jesus’ grace because of a curse of sin from your forefathers.

Finally, I also believe that particularism is the best view as the Christian understanding on salvation because particularism best encompasses Jesus’ commission to go out to the nations and teaching the word. In other words missions. In both, pluralism and inclusivism, you lose the attraction of missions. What would be the point of Jesus’ great commission if other religions got into heaven anyways. Pluralist might as well sit back and kick up their feet because if all religions can reach salvation then what is the point of Jesus. Inclusivist would have a mission in those religions that are not morally good, but Jesus does not command us to go teach his word to only those who have no morals. No Jesus tells us to go to all the nations and speak the good news! Clearly if you do not believe in Jesus as the only way to reach salvation, why would there be any need for missionaries.

The world is a fast and growing place. Many people are in search of the truth and there are many aspect on what is truth. As a Christian I believe that the particularist view
that Jesus is the only way to receive salvation is the overriding truth. John Hick’s attempt to prove pluralism as the truth for Christians, turned out unconvincing. His whole argument proves that Christianity is a false religion, and all our core beliefs must be changed. The inclusivist argument was very compelling, but still lacking in some areas. The inclusivist fails to prove the Bible would support that one can receive Jesus’ grace not know it, and still practice pagan religions and receive salvation. The particularist view used many scriptures to back up our claim that receiving Jesus’ grace, by actual faith in him is the only way to salvation. The particularist view does not compromise God and his authority, nor does it compromise God’s word and his promises. Particularist fulfill the need for the great commission and fulfill God’s intentions for the salvation that he provided through his son Jesus Christ. As John 3:16 says, “God gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”