

## CHRISTOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF INCULCIVISM THEOLOGY

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### *Abstract*

Inclusivism is defined as a mindset that recognizes that Jesus' liberation mission is addressed to every human being without exception. As a result, each and every person has the right to salvation and release. This theology does not want to be viewed as cruel by exclusivism, but neither does it want to be regarded as rejecting Christ's uniqueness by pluralism, thus it chooses the middle ground, namely inclusivism. This study employs qualitative special literature on verses like as John 3:8, 1 Timothy 2:4, 1 John 4:7-8, and Acts 10:22, which are utilized by Inclusivism as the foundation for their Christological beliefs. The Inclusivist Trinitarian Christology undermines the idea of Christ as a Special Revelation because it obscures the privilege of Christ as Revelation (John 1:1) and the Bible as a Special Revelation by the Holy Spirit's inspiration by 'perpetuating the News of Christ' in order to remain available to everyone throughout all centuries.

**Keywords:** *Inclusivism, Exclusivism, Pluralism, Christology, Exegesis.*

### INTRODUCTION

This inclusivism theology is a theology that straddles the line between exclusivism and pluralism. He does not want to be perceived as cruel by exclusivism, but neither does he want to be perceived as neglecting Christ's uniqueness by pluralism, therefore he chooses the middle ground, inclusivism. The

mainstream Protestant churches' basic approach toward the view or relationship of truth in the Christian faith to other religions is known as inclusivity. The Roman Catholic Church's view of other, more

positive religions,<sup>1</sup> which had been ingrained since the Council of Trent and began to bear fruit, sparked a general attitude held by most circles in Protestant Christianity, which was initially stimulated by the Roman Catholic Church's view of other, more positive religions.<sup>2</sup>

That is why, it is important to take a deeper look at inclusivism, which is referred to as an attitude that is generally adopted from within the Roman Catholic Church and which has since been accepted by mainstream Protestant churches. In contrast to exclusivism which is currently embraced by a small group in Protestant Christianity, one of which is the Evangelical community, so is pluralism which is also embraced by a small group within Protestant Christianity which is commonly referred to as a liberal group. Thus, inclusivism becomes important to highlight its truth and the way it articulates the main principles contained in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ahmad Khoirul Fata says,

"There was a shift in mentality among the Christian Church as time went on." They were initially

adamant in their claim to the absolute truth of their traditions, but as time went on, they became more open to various religious traditions. This is the second mindset, which is inclusivism. Inclusivism is defined as a mindset that recognizes that Jesus' liberation mission is addressed to every human being without exception. As a result, every person has the right to salvation and freedom through Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

Fata's use of the term "openness" relates to Christians' shifting theological positions in the postmodern era. This means that Christians believe that inclusivism's concepts are more suited to providing answers in Christian partnerships with people of other faiths. But, as the author points out, there is a problem: can the solution of inclusivism, which offers a middle ground between exclusivism and pluralism, be justified in light of biblical teachings?

D.A Carson said that inclusivism is weak in studying biblical texts, especially those related to the exclusivity of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul F. Knitter, *Satu Bumi Banyak Agama* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2008), 38

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>3</sup> Ahmad Khoirul Fata, *Diskursus dan Kritik Terhadap Teologi Pluralisme Agama di Indonesia* (Gorontalo: Fakultas Ushuluddin dan Dakwah IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo, 2018), 107.

<sup>4</sup> According to him, this is the distinction I mentioned earlier, common among inclusivism, between ontological needs and epistemological needs. There is a certain mechanical logic in an argument that has a fatal flaw (as in Rom. 10:9-10). D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 304.

It's interesting to look at christology in the Theology of Inclusivism because christology is the theological foundation of the inclusivism model.<sup>5</sup> - the way in which this Christian community views Jesus Christ. When confronted with the question of how we should treat other religions, some Christian theologians have chosen to reformulate a soteriology that "doesn't harm" their existence. This, according to the author, is a doctrinal compromise that, in the end, corrects Christian teaching. Inclusivism begins with a re-engineering of Christology in order to arrive at a "friendly" soteriological notion for inter-religious relations. The historical life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are fundamental of salvation for an inclusive; it indicates that God's offer of righteousness and saving grace has occurred, or has been made possible, through his historical life, death, and resurrection. "...whatever truth and presence of the Spirit in other religions is "anonymously Christian" – Christian without a name – generated by and led toward fullness in Jesus and His followers," Paul F. Knitter wrote in his works."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Knitter, *Satu Bumi Banyak Agama*, 39.

<sup>6</sup> Knitter, *Satu Bumi Banyak Agama*, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Prof. Dr. Lexy J. Moleong, M.A., *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2017), 51

## RESEARCH METHOD

In this study the authors used qualitative research methods. This method is also known as naturalistic or natural research. The paradigm of natural research<sup>7</sup> is that reality is numerous, formed, and whole; the seeker and the knower are working in tandem, and hence cannot be separated; In terms of generalization, each whole is entangled in a web of reciprocal impact, making it impossible to tell which is cause and which is effect.

This form of research falls under the category of library research or library research because of the subject of investigation. Unlike quantitative or field qualitative research methods, the literature research approach does not rely on statistics or calculating procedures to conduct research or create conclusions.<sup>8</sup> Data-data yang ditemukan sebagian besar berupa data from tangan kedua (sekunder), serta keadaan data tidak dibagi berdasarkan ruangan dan waktu, bahwa data-data yang ditemukan sebagian besar berupa data dari tangan kedua (sekunde).<sup>9</sup>

This research method will make the results of research on the topic raised more accurate

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2004).

because the thoughts of Inclusivism have been poured out in the writings of Inclusivism figures or their successors and then become the way of thinking of some Christian groups today.

In this section, the writer will analyze specifically the verses used by the Inclusivism as the basis for their Christological teachings, including: John 3:8, 1 Timothy 2:4, 1 John 4:7-8, Acts 10:22. The analysis that will be used by the researcher is contextual analysis, grammatical analysis, historical analysis and theological analysis.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Christological Evaluation of Inclusivism in John 3:8**

Through the Trinitarian Christology model, Inclusivism has misinterpreted John 3:8 by saying that the Holy Spirit is the Christ who is present in universal human transcendence as a grace or gift of God that enables every human being to be saved without the need to have knowledge of Christ, and thus Inclusivism states that God is present in every religion. Inclusive theologians do not see the exclusivity of Christ as the Person of God who brings salvation to the world, so through its Trinitarian Critology, Inclusivism 'opens' Christ into an inclusive Person present in

everyone around the world and in every religion, through the person of the Holy Spirit. Inclusivism neglects to look at the context of John 3:8 where "freedom of the Spirit" which should be understood as a description of the possibility of being born again because through the Spirit, is instead interpreted as "freedom of the Spirit" in the context of saving all mankind. Inclusivism does not pay attention to Nicodemus' question in John 3:4 which indicates his doubts about being born again because it is impossible for him to enter his mother's womb and be born again. Jesus' answer in John 3:8 is part of the simple explanation Jesus gave that rebirth is not understood as birth of the flesh, but 'through the Spirit', because the Spirit is free to carry out His activities without being constrained by the flesh. Inclusivism does not pay attention to the context away from John's authorship, that the Gospel of John was written not as a preaching of grace that works in every human being without humans being aware of it, but the Gospel of John was written so that readers accept Jesus as the Son of God, so that salvation is not only understood ontologically but also epistemologically.

Inclusivism theologians do not see the grammar of John 3:8a that the phrase "...the wind is blowing..." is in the active present tense where it means that the wind is moving either it comes or goes, it does not

stay, while the phrase which refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in verse 8b has a perfect passive participle grammar where the tense indicates something that has happened, finished or finished, is not parallel to the phrase "...the wind is blowing..." so the two phrases cannot be aligned or the phrase in verse 8a is not to explain the work of the Holy Spirit that regenerate in verse 8b.

Based on historical analysis, the researcher finds the fact that the writing of the Gospel of John in a socio-historical context – in this case the pagan nations around Israel, Roman-Greek – is not a notification that everyone has been saved supernaturally by the Holy Spirit because Christ has been incarnated, but on the other hand, the writing of John is in the context of evangelism or preaching about Christ which indicates the need to consciously know the message about Christ so as to receive Him and be saved.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, the researcher learns through theological analysis that Inclusivism's Trinitarian Christology paradigm weakens Christ's exclusivity as the only Persona who is the Way of

Salvation. He claims that the Holy Spirit is Jesus Christ's representative.<sup>11</sup> Whereas Christ himself was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:26), Christ himself was the incarnation of God (Phil. 2:5), Christ himself lived a holy life (1 Pet. 2:21), Christ himself died as the condemned – a substitute death – (Isa. 53:4; Rom. 3:21; 2 Cor. 2:21; Gal. 3:10), Christ himself rose from the dead and triumphed over sin (Acts 2:22). ; Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Cor. 15:16). That is why, it is Jesus Christ who is qualified as Savior as confirmed by the apostle Peter that "salvation is in no one but in Him, for there is no other name under heaven given to man by which we can be saved." (Acts 4:12).<sup>12</sup>

### **The Christological Evaluation of Inclusivism in 1 Timothy 2:4**

In its Transcendent Christology model, Inclusivism has misinterpreted 1 Timothy 2:4 to mean that the incarnation of Christ is the culmination of human universal evolution, so that when Christ takes on human transcendence, every human being (even non-Christian or atheist) can be saved without needing to know Christ and believe Him consciously.<sup>13</sup> Inclusivism

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/> (diakses pada Mei 2021)

<sup>11</sup> Sanders, John. *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 252

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.christianity.com/bible/only-one-way-the-exclusivity-of-jesus-christ-and-the-gospel-11602124.html> (diakses 20 Mei 2021)

<sup>13</sup> Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol 16, translated by David Morland, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1979), 391

does not see the verse contextually. So they don't notice that the immediate context of 1 Timothy 2:4 is part of the "prayer for salvation", not "the news that all are saved", and that the word 'all' means God wants all classes - in this case the author refers to groups kings and princes - to be saved. Inclusivism theologians ignore the phrase "...acquire a knowledge of the truth..." as part of salvation, which in a distant context, this phrase is made clear in Titus 2:11 and 2 Peter 3:9 that salvation remains exclusive within its limitations such as: repentance, hope in Christ's return and understanding of God's Word, namely the Bible.<sup>14</sup>

Through grammatical analysis, it can be seen that the tense for the word 'saved' is passive aoris while God's will for saving the tense is now active indicative. That is, those whom He wants to be saved are actually those who have been saved, not those who have not been saved, while God's longing continues for those who have been saved. Indeed, the Bible always presents God who longs for the salvation of all people, especially the texts in the Bible that represent God's love that is limitless and does not see conditions, but God also does not cancel the requirement to answer His longing, namely that everyone who wants to

be saved must accept Jesus Christ, the only mediator, as Paul affirms in 1 Timothy 2:5-6. That is why believers are commanded to pray for unbelievers to open their hearts and accept Jesus Christ, the only Mediator which means there is no alternative mediator. Thus, this verse is not appropriate if used for an argument which states that everyone in the whole world must be saved because God desires everyone in the world to be saved. The Christology of Inclusivism over-emphasizes the notion that everyone does not need to consciously 'know Christ' because God is already present in human transcendence. Inclusivism focuses more on verse 2 but ignores the requirements that Paul emphasizes.

Inclusivism theologians do not see the historical context of the letter of 1 Timothy so they neglect to understand that the letter was written to maintain the purity of the teachings or the gospel in the midst of gnosticism and other heresies that developed at that time. From this, inclusivism theologians should know that preaching salvation is something serious to do because evangelism is related to the exclusivity of Christ..<sup>15</sup>

The phrase "everyone is possible to survive without understanding or

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<sup>14</sup> Tafsiran Alkitab Wycliffe, [www.sabda.org](http://www.sabda.org) (diakses pada Mei 2021)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/> (diakses pada Mei 2021)

knowledge of Christ" is built from the anthropology offered by Rahner regarding the transcendent man. Geivett and Phillips also explain that "much of the inclusive optimism about the possibility of salvation without having knowledge of Jesus Christ is based on biblical references to God's universal saving will."<sup>16</sup>

D. A. Carson quotes Ramesh P. Richard in *The Gagging of God*, who draws two conclusions from this verse: "First, instead of a universal saving will, Peter extends a universal saving welcome to anyone from any country. Second, there is also the axiom of particularity — the acceptance of forgiveness for everyone is through the name of Jesus and belief in Him."<sup>17</sup> Finally, assuming that God's will is as broad as His plan of salvation, inclusivism seems to be compelled to argue that 1 Timothy 2:4 teaches universal salvation (i.e., universalism) and not just universal access to salvation. As has been observed, inclusivists confuse the wider heart of God with broader expectations.<sup>18</sup>

Howard Marshall also comments on 1 Timothy 2:4 as in order to avoid all misunderstandings, it should be made clear from the outset that the fact that God wills or wills all people to be saved does not necessarily mean that all will respond to the gospel and be saved. We must of course distinguish between what God wants to see happen and what He actually does will happen, and both of these can be said to be God's will (emphasis).<sup>19</sup>

John Piper uses a more theological tone to express the same that it is God's will to save all, while also asserting the unconditional election of the few, implying that there are at least "two desires" in God, or two ways of will. This implies that God ordained one state while also desiring and teaching that a different state should occur.<sup>20</sup>

Researchers have discovered that both texts mention God's desire to save everyone, but this does not imply that He will. Only those who believe in Jesus will be saved. As a result, the researcher believes that while

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<sup>16</sup> Geivett and Phillips, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, (Zondervan Academic, 2010). 239.

<sup>17</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God*, Revised ed. edition. (Zondervan Academic, 2002). , 307.

<sup>18</sup> Geivett and Phillips, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, (Zondervan Academic, 2010). 239.

<sup>19</sup> "Are There Two Wills in God?," *Desiring God*, last modified January 1, 1995, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/are-there-two-wills-in-god>.

<sup>20</sup> "Are There Two Wills in God?," *Desiring God*, last modified January 1, 1995, accessed May 21, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/are-there-two-wills-in-god>.

God desires to save everyone, He only does it for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

### **The Christological Evaluation of Inclusivism in 1 John 4:7-8**

The Transcendence Christology of Inclusivism degrades the exclusivity of Christ as the finality of salvation. In fact, exclusivism is part of the Bible and the Christian faith. Jesus Christ is final and exclusive. The researcher concludes that the teachings of the Gospel of Christ are exclusive in their own essence, while the Transcendence Christology offered by Inclusivism is an anthropocentric Christology that God is open to everyone,<sup>21</sup> but salvation is only in faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and savior. As has been stated in the historical basis for the formation of the Theology of Inclusivism. The Transcendent Christology formulated by Inclusivism is full of postmodern philosophy, namely the ideas about human subjectivity that were sparked by Heidegger.

Through the Transcendence Christology model, Inclusivism interprets 1 John 4:7-8 that the incarnation of Christ is a universal revelation of God's love in every human being so that those who are saved do not need to accept the gospel of Christ but simply love others, so all of them who are

non-Christians are love God who has been revealed through the incarnation of Christ in every human being. Inclusivism theologians ignore the close context of the verse where in 1 John 4, John explicitly makes a distinction between those who are 'of God' and those who are 'of the world'. And because 'love' is an exclusive part of those who come from God, then 'love' should not be made a general ethic beyond those who are 'not from God'. Grammatically it is also shown that the word 'love' uses the present tense active participle, the phrase "born from Allah" uses the passive perfect tense, and the phrase "knowing God" using the present-active tense. That is, in the sentence, those who are in love refer to those who have been born of God. Loving does not necessarily make a person born of God, as if being born of God is part of human action.

Saying that 'love' is something inclusive or general, will take the verse out of context, because in verses 9-15, 'love' is only understood as the lifestyle of those who claim that Jesus is the Son of God. Even in other letters in the New Testament, Paul states that "love" is a lifestyle or one of the common characteristics of all believers (1 Cor. 13; Galatians 5:22). Meanwhile, this emphasis on love is also a recurring theme in the writings of the apostle John (John

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<sup>21</sup> Theological Investigations 6.238-239



13:34; 15:12; 1 John 2:7-11; 3:11,23;2 John.1:5 ).

The Inclusive view does not take into account the background of the writing of the Epistle of 1 John, that the apostle John was in a situation of 'encouraging the congregation (of course Christians) to show a loving lifestyle' because it would clarify the differences between those who at that time claimed to be children -the son of Allah, even though he is a deceiver. It is in this apologetic context that the command to love one another is preached by the apostle John through his letter. This shows that the Transcendent Christology model is actually built from biblical foundations eisegesically or deductively.

This Transcendent Christology of Inclusivism was built from their presupposition of anthropology, through postmodern ideas, namely subjectivism. Christ is understood anthropologically by stating that the kenosis of Christ is to put off His divinity to become a human being just like a universal human, so that it is possible for all humans to be saved. The kenosis of Christ is not a reduction in divinity but an increase in humanity. Because Christ's kenosis involved the veil of the glory of Christ's incarnate (John 17:5), His humble

attitude became like that of sinful flesh (Romans 8:3), and some of His divine attributes were not used voluntarily during His lifetime. in this world. (Matthew 24:36).<sup>22</sup>

Inclusivism also believes in Anonymous Christianity where Anonymous Christians are non-Christians who through their respective religions, Christ came and saved. This understanding is built through the Trinitarian Christological model where God through His Spirit, has been present in the history of the world and various civilizations and religions to give general revelation, where the revelation will be perfected by the incarnation of Christ.

When Christ was incarnated, they did not need to leave their general revelation because the special revelation, namely Christ, had perfected the general revelations in each of their respective religions. Thus, they are called nameless Christians. Inclusivism is based on the story of Cornelius who was a pagan but in the end God was merciful through his old religion to be saved. Inclusivism does not look at Cornelius' story comprehensively. Looking at his close context, Cornelius actually became a Christian (Acts 10:48) after Peter

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<sup>22</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *A Survey of Biblical Doctrine* (t.k: Moody Publishers, 1989)

had preached the Gospel of Christ. Inclusivism fails to see the phrase “one who fears God” in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 13:16, 2, 43, 50; Acts 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7) where the phrase is often used. to refer to those who are not of the Jewish race and are not adherents of a full religion, but those who regularly attend synagogues. Grammatically, "fear God" in Greek uses the present-medial-participle tense. The medial diathesis implies that the subject who is Cornelius acts in such a way in the fear of God that he shares in the consequences of his own actions. That is, Cornelius was not in a state of belief in his old religion or general revelation as Inclusivism meant.<sup>23</sup>

Instead of using Cornelius' story as a justification for inclusivism, with a contextual and historical approach, this story emphasizes Christian exclusivism. Where the preaching of the gospel, then the reception of the gospel, is followed by the 'come into a Christian' through baptism as shown in Acts 10:48. To think that general revelation can save by looking at the case that Cornelius 'received God's revelation' in the TB version is also a mistake because in

Greek it literally means “to be shown”, whereas Cornelius 'only saw'. And this cannot be equated with salvation or in the case of 'receiving salvation'.

Historically the story of Cornelius is also built on Jewish-Gentile tensions. God used Peter to express His love and acceptance of the Gentiles.<sup>24</sup> God allowed this radical new understanding to be continued in stages starting with Samaria, the Ethiopian eunuch, and the story of Cornelius. This historical tension was resolved by supernatural experiences that also turned out to be experienced by Gentiles, and that through these events, God wanted to declare: "God loves all people", and was pleased to preach the gospel to all people.

## CONCLUSION

Christology is a vital thing in Christianity so that all topics about Christology must always be the main thing in living the Christian faith, as Charles Spurgeon said, “Teaching without Christ is no better than His empty tomb. The doctrine with Christ is the highest, glorious throne...”<sup>25</sup> Raymond E. Brown also said

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<sup>23</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality Of Jesus Christ In A World Of Religions* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Academic, 1992), 165.

<sup>24</sup><http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/> (diakses pada Mei 2021)

<sup>25</sup> Living Hope Bible Church, *Christology: A Class and the Person of Work of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, (Illinois: Chicago Reformed Theological Institute), 4.

that Christology explains who Christ is and what His work is in carrying out salvation.<sup>26</sup>

The Inclusivist Trinitarian Christology undermines the idea of Christ as a Special Revelation because it obscures the privilege of Christ as Revelation (John 1:1) and the Bible as a Special Revelation by the Holy Spirit's inspiration by 'perpetuating the News of Christ' in order to remain available to everyone throughout all centuries. Because Christ is also present through the Holy Spirit, who moves across religious borders, general revelation can still be employed. Inclusivism not only transforms Christianity into a more inclusive religion, but it also destroys the core of exclusive Christianity, namely Christ and the Bible. Inclusivism underpins its Christology through the postmodern philosophy of subjectivism, resulting in a Christological construct that is more akin to "theological anthropology" than "anthropological theology." His Christology is anthropocentric, emphasizing the universal human side before focusing on Christ's incarnation as a human. As a result, inclusivism Christology's underpinnings are more often found alluding to philosophy than having scriptural basis. Inclusivism approaches the Bible and creates its

theology from an anthropological perspective, so that the understandings that are developed from the texts that are claimed to constitute their biblical basis are deductive rather than exegetical.

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<sup>26</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1998), 3.

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