



The Evaluation of Soteriology in Inclusivist Theology

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ABSTRACT

The theology of inclusivism is one of the three theological approaches in the study of religion. This approach was proposed by Alan Race in his discourse on the relationship between religions. Inclusivism holds a concept of salvation that combines or reconciles the concept of salvation from two other theological approaches, namely exclusivism and pluralism. Exclusivism takes a firm stance and asserts that salvation is only through Jesus as mentioned in the Scriptures. On the other hand, pluralism believes that all religions are valid, and none is superior to the other. Inclusivist theology brings both together by stating that salvation is only possible through Jesus Christ; thus, the requirement for belief is to believe in Jesus. However, other religions can also receive salvation because they have access to Jesus through general revelation. People who attain salvation without believing in Jesus but have access to him through general revelation are called anonymous Christians, namely, brothers at the very margins. This concept is highly demanded by many people, including Christians, as it is more reasonable and tolerant. How does this concept of inclusivity in salvation align with the biblical perspective? This research is a qualitative study that will examine the truth of the concept of inclusivism based on the exegesis of three verses, namely John 14:6, Acts 4:12, and 1 Timothy 2:15.

Keywords: *Inclusivism, exclusivism, pluralism, anonymous Christianity and exegesis.*

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INTRODUCTION

The theology of inclusivism is part of the theology of religion, namely the theology of religions that are currently developing. Theologia religionum is theology that seeks to formulate a common basis that applies to all religions (Obet H Sculman, 2013). The formulation of the basis of this shared faith is intended so that all religions have something in common, no one religion claims to be superior to the other. The theology of inclusivism is a theology that developed in the post-modern era, where this theology seeks to serve human demands in this post-modern era that demand equal rights. Lumintang said that postmodernism society is more inclined to recognize the equality of all rights to life regardless of differences in gender, race and religion. Equal rights for all human beings has become the most favored topic. Because of that, safety is the right of all people in all religions,

not just a group of religions (Stevri Indra Lumintang, 2020). Knitter said: in essence all religions are the same, different paths lead to the same goal. This is another way of a well-known attitude, an attitude that is deeply rooted, namely religious pluralism in a pluralistic society, namely an attitude which Christians are greatly influenced both consciously and unconsciously. This view seems to be such a well-known understanding, especially for religions that believe in the same God, namely the God of love. God will naturally bring everyone to salvation (Paul F Knitter, 1989).

The theology of inclusivism bases its view of salvation between (or as queer) between exclusivism and pluralism. If pluralism emphasizes the equal right to be saved in all religions, no one religion is superior. Theological pluralism is an attitude that accepts all forms and interpretations of faith in the church. This theological pluralism is also found in church associations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the World Council of Churches (Dr Stevri I Lumintang, 2004). This means that there is a tendency that the theological views or teachings of inclusivism will become views or teachings that are of interest to many people in this post-modernism era.

The theology of inclusivism is different from exclusivism which is generally embraced by revealed religions or monotheist religions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam which present a claim of salvation only in adherents of that religion. Judaism with the concept of the chosen people (chosen people) states that salvation is only in the Jews as the chosen people. Christians with their “outside Christianity, no salvation” doctrine determine the status of one's godliness and salvation only by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as a ransom for inherited sins. Whereas Islam states that only submission and total submission to Allah SWT and submission to the pillars of Islam alone can people be saved, as safely contained in the Islamic Al-Qur'an letter Ali Imran: 85 (Ahmad Zamakhsari, 2020).

In religious discourse, inclusivism refers to certain theological positions regarding the relationship between religions. This position is characterized by the belief that while one set of beliefs is absolutely true, another set of beliefs is at least partially true. This is in contrast to exclusivism, which asserts that only one way is right and all others are wrong, and religious pluralism, which asserts that all beliefs are equally valid in the particular context of a believer (The New World Encyclopedia, 2008). But it is very difficult to explain the concept whereby one religion is considered to be truly true and the other half true.

Implicitly theology inclusivism explains that there are two classes of people who are saved and enter heaven. In the first class are those who truly believe in Jesus Christ, while in the second class are those who are saved without the need to believe in Jesus because they already have Jesus through their religion. Even if they do not realize it, they have received grace through general revelation. The theology of inclusivism in Christianity brings together the concepts of the salvation of exclusivism and pluralism. Jesus is the ultimate Savior but other intermediaries embraced by other religions are also saviors. In this case Jesus is not the only savior but one of the saviors even though his position is considered superior to other saviors or intermediaries.

Adherents of religions who believe in Jesus Christ as one of the saviors and in a superior position are called Christians or true Christians, while adherents of other religions who have Jesus through this public revelation are referred to as anonymous Christians. Anonymous Christians are considered as brothers on the periphery of the circle who come from all existing religions, while Christians who are exclusive and emphasize belief in Jesus are at the center of the circle. Non-Christians who act like Christians already have God's grace working in their lives and should be considered anonymous Christians. In this way the church is not limited to visible church institutions but is made up of people who behave and reflect Christians (philosopher kings, n.d.)

With the concept of two classes of people being saved, namely true Christians and anonymous Christians, adherents of inclusivism feel superior to exclusivism which has absolutely zero tolerance or compromise with the concept of salvation of other religions. Inclusivism also feels superior to pluralism, which ignores truth claims in monotheistic or revealed religions, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Theologia inclusivism feels that it provides a good solution to human demands in this post-modern era which carries the theme of theology of religions (theologia Religium).

D. A Carson said that inclusivism is weak in studying biblical texts, especially those related to the exclusivity of Christ (D. A. Carson, 2002). The weakness of inclusivism to see the exclusivity of Christ in the Bible makes them weak to see the exclusivity of salvation in the Bible where Christ explains himself as the only way of salvation. The exclusivity of soteriology in Christianity lies in the exclusivity of Christ himself. Willimon says that at this time we are easily distracted from Christ the only hope for sinners. We only need life guides, not redeemers or saviors. If salvation focuses on figures or individuals who are role models, then salvation can also be obtained from other figures in other religions who show good moral lives. Willimon says that this is a new emergence of Christians, and we are being led there now. And Christianity like this is what he calls Christianity without Christ (Micahel Horton, 2012). This is not getting rid of Christ altogether, but still acknowledging Christ as a role model that leads to salvation but is not finality as the only way of salvation.

Egan says Rahner boldly refers to a non-Christian—even an agnostic or an atheist—as Anonymous Christian, when that person has surrendered his being to the deepest depths. Those who personally follow their conscience live a life of saving faith. Such faith is made possible through God's self-giving in Christ (Harvey D. Egan, n.d.).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research will use a qualitative paradigm, namely a paradigm that has a broad research scope; including hermeneutic phenomenology, namely qualitative research that focuses on interpreting life texts and life experiences (John W. Creswell, 2015) Qualitative research is research in which the source of the data is display in the form of spoken or written words which are scrutinized by the researcher, and the objects observed in detail so that the implicit meaning in the document or object can be captured (Suharsini Arikunto, 2014). Qualitative research is a type of research that utilizes a methodology with inductive characteristics, which are influenced by the researcher's experiences in collecting and analyzing data. The logic that a researcher follows is inductive, starting from the ground up, rather than being entirely drawn from a theory or the researcher's perspective (John W. Creswell, 2015). In theological research using the exegesis method, an exegete must have already mastered the steps of analysis in order to understand the meaning of Bible texts. According to Grassmick, exegesis is both a science and an art, based on hermeneutic principles that are necessary for interpreting Bible verses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theological analysis of Sotreriological concept of inclusivism based on John 14:6

Analysis of the context of John 14:16 shows that Jesus' statement saying that I am the way, the truth and the life is meaningful as a way of being saved. The context of Jesus' conversation with his disciples is that Jesus will ascend to heaven where the father is, and that one day the disciples will live together in heaven. Jesus said to them, where I am going, you know the way. This became an inducement statement to the disciples that they knew

the way to heaven or to the Father's house. Thomas asked how we know the way to the Father's house where You are going? So when Jesus said I am the way, the truth and the life, he was talking about the way of salvation to eternal life. Moreover, the word life in this verse uses the word ζωή which means supernatural Life or eternity (Feinberg, 2019c). Structurally the book of John is divided into 2 parts, chapters 1-12 with the topic so that you believe, while chapters 13-17 are so that you may have life through your faith (Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, 2017). So in context the word way stated by Jesus means the way of salvation or the way to have eternal life.

A grammatical analysis of John 14:6 is the key to rejecting the theological concept of inclusivism which introduces two paths, namely salvation through a special statement namely Jesus and salvation outside of Jesus through a general statement. Grammatically this verse really closes the existence of other alternatives to be saved. Several important words in the text which show the way of salvation are truly exclusive include: first the word ἐγώ εἰμι. Actually the word εἰμι. means I am the way without the word ἐγώ. The word εἰμι is an active indicative verb, first person singular. Which means that Jesus the way of salvation is an indicative certainty, not a possibility. The word ἐγώ does not appear much in the Bible texts. When the word ἐγώ appears, it means an affirmation which can be interpreted as "I am, I am, there is no other. The two nouns way in Greek ἡ ὁδὸς are singular nouns, meaning no other way, only this way. The third is the emergence of the word οὐδεὶς which is an indefinite nominative masculine singular pronoun from οὐδεὶς which means negating another, negating other objects, other persons or other ways (Feinberg, 2019c). The pronouns, verbs and nouns in this verse show that the way of salvation is truly single (exclusive) and there is no other way or way to obtain salvation.

Historical analysis shows that the revelation of Jesus as the way of truth and life is intended to break the teaching of gnosticism which states that salvation is by revelation alone (D A Carson & Douglass J Moo, 2016). Guthrie says that the book of John was written in the midst of an opposition and struggle to eradicate gnosticism which declared the incarnation of Jesus unnecessary. One school of gnosticism, namely docetism, said that Jesus did not need to be a real human being, so it was enough to take an artificial body so that he could be present to set an example for humans. Because if you have to take a physical body then Christ will be polluted by this evil world. Christ did not actually become flesh but only "appeared to be flesh, for any contact with matter would defile Him. The coming of Jesus to the world is not to die and redeem mankind but to reveal (Donald Guthrie, 2012). Jesus refuted the gnosticism that claimed salvation by revelation and ignored the importance of the atonement. From John 1:1 and 14 it can be seen that Jesus showed an argument stating that He really became flesh (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο) in verse 14. In addition, Jesus declared Him to be the way, the truth and life after He died and rose from the dead. And the true Saviour is to be like that. This becomes the basis that the way of salvation in the Bible is very exclusive in only one way, namely by believing in Jesus, namely God who descended into human or flesh, died and rose from the dead. Salvation through revelation alone, as adhered to by Gnosticism, cannot be justified; that is, salvation which is invalid. The concept of salvation taught by inclusivism theology is essentially the same as gnosticism. Salvation is based on revelation, not in accordance with Jesus' revelation in John 14:6.

Theological analysis of Soteriological concept of inclusivism based on Acts 4:12

The context analysis shows that Peter and John proclaimed the name of Jesus with boldness even when they were forbidden by the high priest. Peter and John's experience with Jesus and their experience of using Jesus' name in performing the miraculous sign (3:6) made them not flinch in the slightest. They are well aware that the only name that saves is the name Jesus, and no other name. They were not even threatened with a declaration that Jesus was the only way and ordered to stop preaching that name (4:1-2). Peter emphatically said he would choose

to submit to God who saves rather than follow the orders of the high priests, including Annas and Caiaphas, John and Alexander (4:6, 19).

For Peter and John Jesus as the only way of salvation is inviolable. This is final and absolute. They show their willingness to suffer and even be willing to die for the name that saved them, and the fact that these two apostles died as martyrs. The two apostles recognized that everyone's greatest need is salvation from sin and God's wrath, and they preached that no one but Christ could meet that need. This reveals the exclusive nature of the Gospel and the heavy responsibility of the church to share it with everyone (YLSA, 2022).

The uniqueness of the book of Acts is that it displays the positions and names of great people such as the noble Theophilus (1:10), the high priests Annas and Caiaphas, John and Alexander (4:6), also Sergius and Gallio as proconsuls (13:7- 8, 8:12), The Polyarch in Thessalonica (17:8) (John Drane, 2016). And many people hope in these big names, because they have authority and give salvation. But for Peter and John, none of those great names bring salvation, because there is a name above all names that brings salvation, namely the name of Jesus. Philippians 2:9 explains that the name Jesus is the name above all names. Matthew 1:21 the name Jesus is the name announced by the angel to Joseph which means savior.

Meanwhile, the grammatical analysis of Acts 4:12 also shows the same thing, namely the exclusive doctrine of salvation. The author of the Acts of the Apostles teaches that salvation is only obtained through one name, namely the name of Jesus, with another name one cannot be saved. Several Greek words denote the finality of salvation in the name of Jesus alone. The first is the word οὐδὲ which is an adverb whose function is to negate, or to emphasize neither (Feinberg, 2019b). So the use of this word means nothing else, the name Jesus is second to none; And the second word that is important to note is that the word salvation in the text uses the word σωτηρία, which means not only physical safety, but also soul salvation, namely salvation at the end of time (Feinberg, 2019b). The second word is ἕτερον which is a familiar correlative pronoun (which is technically an adjective) meaning another or one personality from another. One of the same kind will be described by the adjective ἄλλος (ABARIM, n.d.).

The English and Indonesian translations of the Bible translate the two terms differently, but in fact the two terms are different. the word ἄλλος means another type but substantially the same, as Jesus called the Holy Spirit as another helper, different but substantially the same, namely the substance of God. Whereas ἕτερον is a different kind and a different substance, or a different kind (William F Aunt & F Wilbuck Gingrich, 1979). If it is related to the context of the name, a name that is not the same as the substance of Jesus as God, no matter how big the name is, it cannot provide salvation. So, no matter how high the position of a person, no matter how big the influence of his name, if he is not God, just like Jesus Christ, who is God who became human, cannot save. Likewise gods who do not become flesh in the sense of being God and human (theanthropic), so these gods cannot save.

Historical analysis of Acts 4:12 is related to the struggles of the apostles or church fathers in formulating their confession of faith. when the book of Acts was written, the name and position behind that name became the concern of many people, as has been explained in the context analysis. That is why the formulation of acknowledgment of salvation must be in the form of the name of the person by whom humans are saved. Peter in Acts 4:12 confirms that the most high above all the names of great people in the book of the Acts of the Apostles is the name of Jesus. Peter explained that the only name he respected and to which believers must submit was the name Jesus. Peter explained that only the name of Jesus has the power to save. This is linear with Paul's revelation of the name above all names in Philippians 2:9. Paul said every tongue must confess that He is Lord and every

knee must bow to him. That is the name that came from Heaven that the angel conveyed to Jesus, His name Jesus means Saviour. So in the formulation of the apostles it is clear that only the name Jesus gives eternal salvation.

Theological analysis of Soteriological concept of inclusivism based on 1 Timothy 2:5

The context of 1 Timothy 2:5 is that Paul recommends prayer for everyone because it is in accordance with God's will which wants everyone to be saved. The salvation of all these people is in accordance with Paul's mission as an apostle to Jews and other nations (United Church of God, 2022). But it must be underlined, even though God wants everyone's safety, Paul also explained that humans are saved from sin and from punishment only through one intermediary, namely the man Jesus Christ. Paul explained that there is only one true mediator, namely the Lord Jesus Christ who truly became human and died to atone for human sins. Paul rejected the teaching that Jesus Christ died as an example in 1 Timothy 2:5, Paul taught Jesus died as a substitute. The scope of salvation is very broad, namely for everyone, but there is only one way of salvation, namely through faith in Jesus Christ.

Grammatical analysis of 1 Timothy 2:15 shows that the way of salvation is single, and there is no other alternative. Paul uses *εἷς καὶ μεσίτης* the word *εἷς* is defined as strictly different from more than one, only one, single, Danker says with focus with singleness (Feinberg, 2019a) The word one really contains salvation through other intermediaries besides Jesus really does not save, this is very exclusive. The second phrase of great hermeneutical importance is the man Jesus Christ (*ἄνθρωπος χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς*). The use of the word human here denotes the incarnate Jesus as described in John 1:14 and Philippians 2:6-9), not the pseudo-human as taught in gnosticism. The mediator who is the savior must be Jesus, as told in the Bible, born of the virgin Mary, suffered, died crucified and on the third day rose from the dead, and after that ascended to heaven.

Historical analysis shows that Paul opposed the path of salvation offered by the sect or heresies that entered the Ephesus congregation. Paul also opposed the teachings of salvation offered by Gnosticism. In this case, 1 Timothy and John have something in common, that is, they both reject salvation through mere revelation (Douglas, 1997). Paul progresses from explaining the Oneness of God to the oneness of the mediator. Paul asserts that neither Moses was the intercessor (Galatians 3:15), nor was he against the Jewish high priest as intercessor, nor were the angels (Colossians 2:18), especially not the aeons of Gnosticism. Aeons are gods that flow from the highest god, where as the distance of the aeon from the highest god or source of divinity decreases (R Budiman, 2008). So historical analysis confirms, there is no salvation outside of the one mediator, namely the man Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of three verses in the New Testament that explicitly speak of the way of salvation, namely John 14:6, Acts 4:12, and 1 Timothy 2:5, the concept of inclusiveness of salvation cannot be justified. The theological teachings of inclusivism that state that there are two ways in which humans can be saved, namely Christianity through Jesus Christ as a special revelation and non-Christians through general revelation, are contrary to the Bible. This means that the term "anonymous Christians" who are saved without faith in Jesus Christ as God's special revelation cannot be justified. The theological concept of inclusivism, which states salvation through revelation, is essentially the same as the teachings of Gnosticism at the time the New Testament was written. This is clearly seen in historical analysis.

The three New Testament verses mentioned above confirm that there is no other way, no other name, and no other intermediary by which humans are saved except through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ

came down to earth and became human (John 14:6), was crucified and died as a substitute for human sins (2 Corinthians 5:21). Salvation exists only in one person, namely a person with two natures, true God and true man (theanthropic), that is, the person of Jesus Christ. This is a fixed concept in the Bible.

Let us not be swayed by the relativism of today, which seeks a common denominator in all the religions of the world. That is impossible except for the Christian faith, which has nothing in common with any other religion. Every other religion is a human attempt to reach God to be saved. Christianity is the only religion that recognizes that God has reached man and given a Savior. Let us embrace the only Savior and rejoice in His name.

Building the concept of salvation must not be based on sympathy for people with various beliefs but must be based on the Bible as God's special revelation. The Bible is the standard of truth, and this means that teachings about salvation that are contrary to the Bible should not be accommodated. We may love everyone and maintain tolerance with all adherents of religions, but we must not sacrifice the true concept or doctrine of salvation contained in the Bible.

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