# CHRISTUS SALVATOR:
## God's Salvation in Christ, Christ's Finality, and the Christian Mission within a Religiously Pluralistic World

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**Abstract**
Considering the many diverse religious traditions coexisting in the same societies across the globe, the issue of how Christianity relates to other religions has become increasingly important. Theologians have developed three main approaches that address this issue: exclusivism, inclusivism, and religious pluralism. This article offers a critical examination of these approaches using a literature study. It also delves into the truth claim about Christ's finality and salvific role in the world, exploring its implications for Christian missions. It argues that while adhering to Christ's finality in the religiously pluralistic world is still relevant for contemporary Christians, it is necessary to engage respectfully and sensitively when approaching missions among people of other faiths. The article advocates a P-H-D model for missions, demonstrating the significance of three missional attitudes: Perseverance, Humility, and Dialogue.

**Keywords:** Theology of religions; Christ's finality; Salvation; Christian mission; Religious plurality.

## INTRODUCTION

In his Nobel lecture, Kofi Annan, the seventh secretary-general of the United Nations, said, "People of different religions and cultures live side by side in almost every part of the world, and most of us have overlapping identities which unite us with very different groups. We can love what we are without hating what –and who -- we are not. We can thrive in our own tradition, even as we learn from others, and come to respect their teachings."[1] Truly, despite occasional discord within some societies, history has shown that diverse religious traditions among humanity can coexist to a considerable extent. Scholars have described this scenario as religious pluralism. It is one of three prominent approaches to the theology of religions, the others being exclusivism and inclusivism. Alan Race was among the notable scholars who expanded

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[1] Kofi Annan, "Nobel Lecture," *United Nations*, December 10, 2001, accessed September 4, 2023, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2001-12-10/nobel-lecture-delivered-kofi-annan.

on these approaches, which have gained widespread traction today.[2] They provide insight into the relationship between Christianity and other religions, focusing on questions of truth about Christ's finality and the function of religious worldviews in God's salvation plan.

The exclusivist view maintains that salvation is only possible through faith in Christ and that other religions are either false or insufficient for attaining salvation.[3] Conversely, the inclusivist perspective sees Christ as the universal Savior but holds that God's salvific work may extend to people of other faiths.[4] Meanwhile, religious pluralism affirms the validity of multiple religious traditions, each having a unique path to the divine.[5] As Christians strive to fulfill the Great Commission in a religiously plural world, they often confront the challenge of reconciling the claim of Christ's finality with the reality of diverse religious worldviews.

This article explores the theological issue of Christ's finality that emerges when Christianity encounters other religions. It also examines practical ways of engaging in Christian missions amidst religious pluralism. Thus, the article attempts to answer this question: "How can the finality of Christ be upheld in the context of missions without emphasizing Christian exclusivism?" In its methodology, the article reviews relevant literature related to the topic and analyzes a peculiar testimony of a Muslim who converted to Christianity. To do so, it first presents an expanded overview of the three approaches to the theology of religions with a discussion on religious pluralism using the allegory of the blind men and the elephant. Second, it examines the truth claim about Christ's finality and associated issues. Third, the article delves into Christian mission engagement in the context of religious pluralism before finally concluding.

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[2] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982).

[3] Henry S. Wilson, "Salvation in World Religions," *Mission Studies* 19, no. 1 (2002): 108-135, https://doi.org/10.1163/157338302x00071; Paul F. Knitter, "Theocentric Christology," *Theology Today* 40, no. 2 (1983): 130-149, https://doi.org/10.1177/004057368304000204.

[4] Thomas M. Thangaraj, "Jesus the Christ—The Only Way to God and to Human Flourishing," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 52, no. 1 (2017): 44-49, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecu.2017.0010.

[5] Muhammad S. Habib, "Salvation in Non-Christian Religions: Approaches of Christian Theologians in the Post Modern Era," *Mediterranean Center of Social and Educational Research* 6, no. 3 (2015): 163-169, https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n3s2p163.

## DISCUSSION

## Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Religious Pluralism

Like Inclusivism and Pluralism, Exclusivism is a religious and philosophical notion with traces in other religions and is not limited to Christianity. The basic proposition of Christian exclusivism is that truth and salvation exist only in Christianity through Jesus Christ.[6] There is no acceptance of the universality of salvation due to the conviction that it has no scriptural foundation. On the contrary, Christian exclusivism maintains the biblical rootedness of the idea that salvation is in Christ alone and thus restricted to Christianity. Passages like John's gospel, where Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NRSV)[7] and Peter's proclamation recorded in the book of Acts: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), all support exclusivist claims. Exclusivist Christians believe that experiencing Jesus Christ as the truth is crucial. Failing to recognize and accept this reality has consequences. Evangelical Protestants, having a peculiar trait of emphasizing orthodoxy and the Bible as the sole authority for orthodoxy, are notable for espousing exclusivist ideas.[8] Even so, Domenic Marbaniang identified two exclusivist positions: extremists and moderates. Extremists consider every non-Christian religion evil and an opposition to the truth of Christianity. They can sometimes be rigid in their belief, prejudicial, arrogant, and intolerant of other faiths. In sharp contrast, the moderates perceive non-Christian religions to have features that allow for the start of a conversation with them.[9] Exclusivists are keen on preserving the sacredness of Christianity and fulfilling the Christian mission. Lesslie Newbigin, a twentieth-century exclusivist British theologian, argued that "…by proclaiming Christ the Christian world mission offers to all people the possibility of understanding what God is doing in history."[10] Nonetheless, opposing Christian exclusivism, Western liberal

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[6] Harold Netland, "Religious Exclusivism," in *Philosophy of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Issues*, eds. Paul Copan and Chad Meister (John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 68.

[7] All Scripture quotations in this article are taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, 1989.

[8] Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (New York: Rodopi, 2011), 15-18.

[9] Domenic Marbaniang, "Theology of Religion: Pluralism, Inclusivism, Exclusivism," *ACTS Academy*, 2007, https://www.academia.edu/38300310/Theology_of_Religion_Pluralism_Inclusivism_Exclusivism.

[10] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 128-

theologians, particularly Friedrich Schleiermacher, contended, "Let none offer the seekers a system of making exclusive claim to truth, but let each man [person] offer his characteristic, individual presentation."[11]

Additionally, the core tenet of Christian Inclusivism is that while salvation exists only in Christ, God does not limit grace to those who profess faith in Christ. Inclusivism maintains that people of other religions can receive salvation through Christ because Christ's redemptive work extends to all humanity, regardless of their religious affiliation. Inclusivism thus emphasizes the universal scope of God's grace and the possibility of salvation for people of all faiths. It is a "…nuanced position that can be summarized as both acceptance and rejection."[12] For Gavin D'Costa, there are two groups of inclusivists: structural and restrictive.[13] Structural inclusivists believe Christ is God's standard disclosure, offering salvation through other religions. However, restrictive inclusivists accept that Christ's salvific role can sometimes be independent of the Christian Church but reject the legitimacy of other religious worldviews. Inclusivist ideas are mostly predominant but not limited to Roman Catholicism. The German Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner is a proponent of inclusivism. According to Rahner, while Christ is the only source of salvation, God conveys grace historically and socially, even when people are unaware of Christ. He used the word "anonymous" to explain the origin and conveyance of this grace.[14] One of the main criticisms of inclusivism is that it still implies a certain level of superiority of Christianity over other religions. Inclusivists may argue that God's grace extends to other faith practitioners, but they also maintain that salvation is only available through Christ, as exclusivists do.

Around the end of the twentieth century, John Hick and other like-minded theologians began challenging the finality and normativity of Jesus Christ, a shared presupposition of exclusivism and inclusivism, while advocating for religious pluralism. These theologians defined their undertaking as "the crossing of a theological Rubicon."[15] Among Hick's many arguments for taking this position was that the

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[11] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), 175.

[12] Moyaert, *Fragile Identities*, 22.

[13] Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (John Wiley & Sons, 2007), 19.

[14] D'Costa, "Christianity and World Religions," 20-21.

[15] John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (eds), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), viii.

presumption of Christian supremacy severely undermined interactions between European and North American Christianity, blacks, browns, and Jews.[16] Gordon D. Kaufman agrees with Hick, adding, "The tendencies toward absoluteness and exclusivity in traditional Christian faith easily lead to a kind of idolatry that makes it difficult to take other faiths seriously in their own terms…"[17] Similarly, for Stanley Samartha, both inclusivism and exclusivism may even constitute types of religious aggression between Christians and other religious groups and, when paired with mechanisms like military power, can threaten public order and global peace, as has frequently occurred in past times.[18] The need for unity rather than exclusivity among humanity, especially considering current global threats such as nuclear war, is a common idea among many pluralists.

## Religious Pluralism and the Allegory of the Blind Men and the Elephant

Religious pluralism maintains that all religions are valid pathways to the transcendent (God), and no religion is superior or has a monopoly over truth and salvation. Wilfred Cantwell Smith believes that it is unacceptable to assert the distinctiveness of a particular theological system to the transcendent since they all have the same focal understanding and are similar ways through which the transcendent discloses himself, herself (or itself) to humans. For Smith, humans' perception of God continually remains limited. Theological systems cannot fully reveal God. However, they can bring adherents to a reality that is infinitely greater than human beings, God.[19] Smith adds, "…in practice certainly there have been many ways of interpreting doctrinally what is going on in the spiritual life either of humankind at large or more narrowly within one's…community. Whichever of the ways one chooses, it is delinquent not to be ready to relate it to other positions elsewhere on earth."[20] Pluralist

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[16] John Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 18.

[17] Gordon D. Kaufman, "Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 5.

[18] Stanley J. Samartha, "The Cross and the Rainbow: Christ in a Multireligious Culture," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 79.

[19] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Idolatry: In Comparative Perspective," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 55-56.

[20] Smith, "Idolatry," 65.

viewpoints like Smith's resonate with the widely known Indian story of the blind men and the elephant, recounted briefly:

> Once some blind men chanced to come near an animal that someone told them was an elephant. They were asked what the elephant was like. The blind men began to feel its body. One of them said the elephant was like a pillar; he had touched only its leg. Another said it was like a winnowing-fan; he had touched only its ear. In this way the others, having touched its tail or belly, gave their different versions of the elephant. Just so, a man who has seen only one aspect of God limits God to that alone. It is his conviction that God cannot be anything else.[21]

The story teaches that humans tend to claim absolute truth based on their limited, subjective experience as they ignore that of other people, which may equally be valid. For Samartha, maintaining exclusivity for a distinct religion is not an ideal approach to loving one's neighbors as oneself. Samartha believes that "If salvation comes from God-and for Christians it cannot be otherwise-then possibilities should be left open to recognize the validity of other experiences of salvation."[22] Nevertheless, critics argue that religious pluralism undermines the uniqueness of Christianity and dilutes its message. For some evangelicals, pluralism merely denotes the cessation of the Christian mission or the effort to evangelize the world with the saving message of Jesus Christ. Additionally, contrasting the pluralistic claim, a thorough inquiry into world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam discloses several distinctions despite appearing similar. This scenario is visible, especially regarding their distinct perspectives on doctrines like salvation. For instance, in Hinduism, a person who escapes the cycle of samsara attains salvation (moksha). Islam also teaches that a person can gain salvation by believing in God (Allah) alone and God's prophet, Muhammad, while enlightenment is the ultimate pathway to salvation (nirvana) in Buddhism. Lastly, pluralism varies from exclusivism in that it stresses the legitimacy of all faiths. Yet exclusivity is a fundamental trait of truth, rejecting all opposing viewpoints. Therefore, critics perceive pluralism as an expression of exclusivism since it disregards other perspectives that contravene it by maintaining the legitimacy of all

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[21] Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942). Also see Jeffery D. Long, "Religious Experience, Hindu Pluralism, and Hope: Anubhava in the Tradition of Sri Ramakrishna," *Religions* 10, no. 3 (2019): 5, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030210.

[22] Samartha, "The Cross and the Rainbow," 77.

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**Truth Claim Regarding Christ's Finality and Related Issues**

In the words of Kevin Vanhoozer, "A truth claim is a statement on a mission; to be precise, a statement on a mission of truth whose goal is to procure universal acknowledgement."[24] Since the church's inception, the truth claim about Christ's finality and salvific role in the world has attracted several debates. What will become of the people who perished before the arrival of Christ? What will become of people who repudiate the Gospel once He returns? The church has and continues to offer several theological responses to these questions throughout history. In the current postmodern and religiously pluralistic world where truth is relativized and pluralized, especially in Western societies, the finality of Christ has become a point of contention, leading to inquiries concerning how Christians convey their faith in Christ and what God is doing in the world. What will be the destiny of those who die without hearing about Jesus? What about all the people who have heard about Jesus but have not understood or continued to explore more about Him? What can we say about non-Christian cultures that have been mostly untouched by the Christian message for a long time? Will adherents of other religions who do not believe in Christ's finality face damnation? Is there even a need to have faith in a so-called just God who punishes people for not being in the right place at the right time? These and many other questions occasionally surface in conversations between Christians and non-Christians.

In light of the issues above, I take a moderate exclusivist stance as an evangelical Protestant and argue that there is a significant need to remain in noticeable progression with the old Christian tradition handed over from previous generations in Christian scripture. Christ is not just a historical figure but God's final word and revelation to all humanity. As Benno van den Toren observes, "For Christians, the limitation of the canon of authoritative Scriptures is a consequence of their understanding of Jesus Christ as the final revelation of God."[25] The Christian Scripture records, "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has

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[23] Marbaniang, "Theology of Religion: Pluralism, Inclusivism, Exclusivism."

[24] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Trials of Truth: Mission, Martyrdom and the Epistemology of the Cross", in *To Stake a Claim: Mission and the Western Crisis of Knowledge,* ed. J. Andrew Kirk and Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1999), 121.

[25] Benno van den Toren, *Christian Apologetics as Cross-Cultural Dialogue* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 206.

spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word…" (Heb. 1:1-4). Christianity goes beyond just being a religion, where the word "religion" is usually interpreted as a "system and construct."[26] Instead, it finds ground in God's constant desire and search for all humanity to be in God's family through Christ, distinguishing Christianity from all other world religions. John testifies this when speaking about Christ's incarnation: "He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him…But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:10-13). Christianity finds root in the self-disclosure of God to human beings in the individual of Jesus Christ. God is boundless and has an impalpable nature. It is difficult for humans to know God unless God makes Himself known. He has made Himself completely and definitively known in one individual, Jesus. God, as recorded in the Scriptures, has acted conclusively for the salvation of humans through Jesus Christ. The expectation of humankind lies in the realm of God, which is currently at work in the world, awaiting fulfillment in the return of Jesus Christ.

Does this position not sound parochial and prejudicial to other faiths? What does it imply today for evangelical Christians in the postmodern and religiously pluralistic world? Newbigin helps to answer these questions when he argues:

> We can and must welcome a plural society because it provides us with a wider range of experience and a wider diversity of human responses to experience, and therefore richer opportunities for testing the sufficiency of our faith than are available in a monochrome society. As we confess Jesus as Lord in a plural society, and as the Church grows through the coming of people from many different cultural and religious traditions to faith in Christ, we are enabled to learn more of the length and breadth and height and depth of the love of God (Eph. 3:14-19) than we can in a monochrome society. But we must reject pluralism. We must reject the invitation to live in a society where everything is subjective and relative, a society which has abandoned the belief that truth can be known and has settled for a purely subjective view of truth- 'truth for you' but not truth for all.[27]

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[26] Christoph Auffarth and Hubert Moher, "Religion," *The Brill Dictionary of Religion*, ed. Kocku von Stuckrad, trans. Robert R. Barr (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1611.

[27] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 243-244

**Christian Mission Engagement in a Pluralist Society**

According to Lalsangkima Pachuau and Knud Jørgensen, "Mission is what the church is sent to be – koinonia, community, presence, nearness, worship. Mission is what the church is sent to do – diakonia, care, service. Mission is what the church is sent to say – kerygma, proclamation of the gospel, dialogue, apologetics. The overriding concept is that *mission is witness to others about the gospel*."[28] The New Testament can be interpreted through a missiological lens as the "testimony (witness) of witnesses, equipping other witnesses for the common mission of the church."[29] Thus, in the Christian mission, the church partakes in God's ministry of reconciliation, witnessing to adherents of other religious worldviews the fundamental Christian truth claim that "...in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself..." (2 Cor 5:18-20). The mission of God is the source of the church's existence and identity. From the perspective of Emilio Castro, "Mission is the fundamental reality of our Christian life. We are Christians because we have been called upon by God to work with him in the fulfillment of his purposes for humanity as a whole. Our life in this world is life in mission. Life has a purpose only to the extent that it has a missionary dimension."[30] Notwithstanding, the church cannot fulfill this God-given mandate without connecting with God. As Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder correctly mention, "Like life itself, and like any ministry, engaging in God's mission is an art. One needs to be in touch with the sources of creativity, the Holy Spirit, to know just how to proceed. It is the Spirit who opens our ears to listen, and who anoints our tongues to speak, who enflames our hearts to witness."[31] The church's active involvement in God's ministry arouses the need to constantly explore Spirit-led, effective approaches to missions in the face of religious plurality. In doing so, it is worth asking, how can Christians approach missions among people of other faiths? To answer, i focus on Christian-Muslim encounters, citing the testimony of Abdul Saleeb, a Muslim convert to Christianity:

> My first encounter with the gospel and the Christian faith was through the ministry of a group of American missionaries in Europe. When I discovered that

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[28] Lalsangkima Pachuau and Knud Jørgensen (eds.), *Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic World Christian Mission among Other Faiths* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2011), 23.

[29] Darrell Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2000), 53-55.

[30] Emilio Castro, "Liberation, Development, and Evangelism: Must We Choose in Mission?" *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 2, no. 3 (1978): 87.

[31] Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2011), 55.

Christians did not believe that Jesus was simply a prophet, but God incarnate who had died on the cross for our sins, my first reactions were: 1. Christians are insane. 2. How can anyone believe such blasphemies? Through many months of attending church, reading the Bible and comparing it with the Qur'an, and debating with my Christian friends, the Spirit of God finally opened my eyes to see the truth and beauty of Christ. The two truths that touched me the most to convince me of the truth of the gospel were the Old Testament prophecies about Christ and especially His deity (for example, Isa 9:6), and the emphasis on grace and love in the New Testament.[32]

Saleeb's narrative underscores three significant missionary approaches. The first is perseverance. The American Christian missionaries took on the challenge and left their comfort zones, traveling to Europe for mission work and meeting Saleeb at some point. They seem to have had a quest to carry out Jesus' missionary directive to His disciples and the church, "Make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28-16-20). Again, from the narrative, Saleeb's Christian friends found it necessary to persevere in patiently discussing the truth about Christ with them because they had confidence in the gospel. The gospel frequently faces opposition from different dimensions during mission engagements, sometimes challenging Christians to reconsider their beliefs, especially when confronted with questions like, why should I put my faith in Jesus over that? Nonetheless, as van den Toren rightly observes, "The gospel is entrusted to the people of God, and it is this community that has the task to show within the world what it means to live by this Gospel and to invite everyone to join them in recognizing their Lord."[33] As those who have been led to confidence in Jesus as Lord and Savior by God's activity, it is essential to negotiate every encounter through perseverance by boldly testifying about experiences of Christ and praying that others may have the privilege of joining God's family (1 John 1:3). There is no need to be "…ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith…" (Rom 1:16). Even so, it is worth acknowledging that there are mysteries of faith that have not been resolved for many years; however, as life progresses, the original faith will be reaffirmed, deepened, and enlarged.[34]

Another missionary approach portrayed in the narrative is dialogue. John R.W. Stott, a prominent evangelical theologian, espoused dialogue as a valuable approach to

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[32] Abdul Saleeb, "Reaching Muslims with the Gospel of God: An Interview with Abdul Saleeb," *Ligonier Ministries,* May 25, 2013, http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/reaching-muslims-gospel-god.

[33] van den Toren, *Christian Apologetics as Cross-Cultural Dialogue*, 141.

[34] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 243.

Christian missions in the middle of the 1970s and remains as such even today.[35] It signifies "witnessing to our deepest convictions, whilst listening to those of our neighbors in a two-way exchange."[36] Comparably, for Bevans and Schroeder, "dialogue can be understood as the practice of openness to, fairness and frankness with, respect for, sincerity toward and appreciation of people of other Christian churches or other religious ways, those who hold to a particular ideology (e.g., Marxism), those for whom faith commitment is meaningless (e.g., secularists) or those who have no faith at all."[37] Through dialoguing with his Christian friends, missionaries, and the church, Saleeb gained more knowledge about Christ, with the Holy Spirit disclosing insights about Christ to him. Dialogue is instrumental in the Christian call to people of other faiths to consider their belief in Christ and whether or not the latter chooses to respond to this call of the former. It is worthwhile to try not to step upon others' profoundly held convictions or compel others to accept the Christian truth in what Vanhoozer describes as the "crusader model of staking a claim."[38] Dialoguing with people of other faiths like Muslims, helps Christians reflect on their limitations and vulnerabilities, serving as a mirror where they can assess their life journey with Christ. Thus, Christians should be open to learning from their dialogue partners and not always focus on converting them. Newbigin is right when he cites the example of Peter's encounter with the Gentile Cornelius at Caesarea (Acts 10) and argues:

> A Christian cannot try to evade the accusation that, for him or her, dialogue is part of obedient witness to Jesus Christ. But this does not mean that the purpose is to persuade the non-Christian partner to accept the Christianity of the Christian partner. Its purpose is not that Christianity should acquire one more recruit. On the contrary, *obedient* witness to Christ means that whenever we come with another person (Christian or not) into the presence of the cross, we are prepared to receive judgment and correction, to find that our Christianity hides within its appearance of obedience the reality of disobedience.[39]

Besides, during mission-oriented interreligious dialogue, Christians must attempt to figure out who the other individual is in the eyes of God, as the Bible teaches that God created human beings in His image (Gen. 1). Therefore, God's love extends to

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[35] John R.W. Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1975), 58-81.
[36] Pachuau and Jørgensen, *Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic World Christian Mission among Other Faith*, 23.
[37] Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 21.
[38] Vanhoozer, "The Trials of Truth," 133.
[39] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 182.

all people, regardless of religious affiliation. Exclusivist Christians, particularly those with extremist beliefs, may prematurely label individuals of different religions as lost and doomed, portraying themselves as God's appointed judges instead of engaging in dialogue in love. Such an approach is counterproductive to the church's mission. That said, Moyaert identified two significant pitfalls in dialogue. Firstly, striking a balance between openness and faith commitment can be problematic during mission dialogue.[40] Secondly, there is the "...irresolvable tensive relationship between too much openness and too little openness... Because human beings are fragile, they do not succeed in 'solving' the tensive dialogical relationship."[41]

Furthermore, humility is a vital asset in the conduct of missions everywhere and on every occasion: "There is a real need today to recognize that mission should be done in vulnerability, in humility..."[42] The Apostle Peter reminded the early Christians of this missional approach when he said, "...in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with *gentleness* and reverence" (1 Pet 3:15). Likewise, Paul mirrored *gentleness* (or humility) in his mission to Gentiles in Thessalonica by offering the gospel and himself to them (1 Thess 2:7-8). In Saleeb's previously cited testimony, it is observable that his Christian friends and the church he visited demonstrated humility in witness by avoiding judgmental dispositions toward him and engaging him in constructive conversations, which later led to his conversion.

**CONCLUSION**

The notion of truth often emerges in interreligious encounters. For Christians, ultimate truth refers to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ and Christ's finality. The church is responsible for propagating this truth preserved in Christian scripture and bearing witness to it at all times through the Christian mission enterprise. Christ's finality remains a pivotal subject in the encounter between Christianity and other religions, demonstrating its relevance even today. Still, to communicate the Christian truth to other faith adherents, perseverance, dialogue, and humility are necessary attitudes to be mindful of. These three approaches combine to form a P-H-D model that

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[40] Moyaert, *Fragile Identities,* 277.
[41] Moyaert, *Fragile Identities,* 280.
[42] Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue,* 22.

this article advocates in pursuing missions within and outside Christianity. Despite its potential pitfalls, it is worthwhile to examine the application of this model in different contexts. Perseverance is requisite to maintaining faith through the often-challenging task of mission, and dialogue allows for an experience of other faith practitioners, where Christians can learn about them, leading to self-discovery and a better understanding of God's work of redemption within the world. In addition, doing missions in the spirit of humility prevents Christians from claiming superiority over people of other faiths, reminding them of God's grace and love in Jesus Christ that brings humanity to the knowledge of God (Eph 2:8-9). I share in David Bosch's assertion that "The church is not made up of spiritual giants; only broken men can lead others to the cross."[43]

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