



Edited by Bernhard Reitsma
and Erika van Nes-Visscher

Religiously Exclusive, Socially Inclusive?

A Religious Response

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Acknowledgements

The present volume *Religiously Exclusive, Socially Inclusive? A Religious Response* is the fruit of a research project of scholars and academic researchers. Between exclusion and inclusion there exists a certain tension. To some extent all religions are exclusive, either in their view on salvation or in their outlook on society, as will be introduced in Chapter 1. Amid all kinds of challenges and conflicts between religious groups in our world today, this raises the question of whether it is possible for exclusive worldviews to live and work together for the common good of society. The focus of the inquiry was specifically on religious texts but developed from there into wider areas of research.

The research project was initiated by the Academic Chair 'The Church in the Context of Islam'. This chair aims to develop a Christian theology in the context of Islam, revolving around the theological challenges Islam presents for church and society today. The chair is currently positioned at the Faculty of Religion and Theology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Scholars from different institutions,¹ within different disciplines,² and from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim backgrounds participated in the research around whether religious exclusivism could go together with inclusive living in society.

After the research project came to an end, Dorottya Nagy was willing to take on the challenge of writing a postlude concerning the missiological challenges that the theme raises. We – Erika van Nes-Visscher and Bernhard Reitsma – have done the same from a theological perspective. These missiological and theological insights highlight issues that need further research and could be addressed at a future meeting.

We are very grateful for the inspiring scholars in the research network, and we want to thank all those who contributed to this volume for their committed contributions and their effort to provide their papers on time, or almost on time, in the middle of all kinds of personally and professionally challenging circumstances. The contributions have been blind double peer-reviewed.

Dr. Wilbert van Saane provided us with a first editorial review of all the articles and we are very grateful for his work. We would like to thank

1 Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Protestant Theological University, the Evangelical Theological Faculty Leuven, Tilburg University, and Radboud University Nijmegen.

2 Textual studies, hermeneutics, philosophy of religion, social studies, practical theology, interreligious studies, anthropology, postcolonial theology, missiology.

Helen Pears for meticulously reviewing the whole manuscript, correcting and improving the English language of us as non-native speakers and harmonizing the chapters down to the jot and tittle. And we thank the team of Amsterdam University Press for their enthusiasm for publishing this volume right from the start and for the pleasant and professional way of guiding this process.

1 Exclusion versus Inclusion: Searching for Religious Inspiration

Bernhard Reitsma

Abstract

This introduction to the volume explores the research question of whether it is possible to be religiously exclusive and at the same time socially inclusive. It analyses the different meanings of exclusivism and inclusivism in different contexts and outlines the problem of how religious exclusivism can and does sometimes collide with social inclusion, especially in the context of absolute truth claims of monotheistic religions. The heart of the research is the reading of exclusive texts, starting with the issue of the death penalty for apostasy. This is the most exclusive form of religious and social exclusion, which is required by all Abrahamic religions. How do religious traditions interpret such exclusive texts, and do they necessarily exclude social inclusion?

Keywords: apostasy, exclusivism, inclusivism, exclusion, inclusion, monotheism

Introduction

‘I killed God and buried Him.’ That is what Jason Walters said after he was deradicalized. Walters is an ex-Jihadist who was part of the so called ‘Hofstadgroep’, a radical Muslim terrorist group in the Netherlands. Raised in a Christian family, he converted to Islam when he was twelve years old and quite rapidly radicalized at the age of nineteen through contact with the Hofstadgroep. He was – in his own words – a Jihadi seeking to become a martyr. In the process of his arrest in 2004, he wounded five police officers with a hand grenade. He spent nine years in prison and during that time, through a process of study and reflection, he became deradicalized. When asked how that was possible, he answered, because ‘I killed God and buried

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Him'. According to Walters, the only way to part with extremism was to abandon his faith in one God. For him, believing in one God and being a faithful inclusive citizen of a democratic society simply did not go together. Monotheism always leads to exclusion and violence.¹

That sounds like Jean-Jacques Rousseau's problem of the damned neighbour. In his *The Social Contract* he writes, 'It is impossible to live at peace with those we regard as damned; to love them would be to hate God who punishes them: we positively must either reclaim or torment them.'²

This is in a nutshell the tension between religious exclusivism and social inclusivism, which will occupy us here. If one considers one's own religion as true and its content and form the unique expression of divine revelation, it automatically seems to imply that we cannot create space for the religious other in society. 'Theological intolerance', as Rousseau calls it, seems incompatible with social inclusiveness. Leaving or, even more, creating space for the right to belong to and practise any other religion would then imply compromising the truth of one's own conviction, either by denying divine judgement or by adopting a more or less pluralistic view on (religious) life and morality. In other words, do we have to compromise social inclusiveness for the sake of religious purity, or do we compromise religious truth for the sake of an inclusive society? In a time of polarization and radicalization, Rousseau's conviction is apparently still timely and needs to be addressed. That is what we intend in this volume.

Research Question

Our main question is if and how it is possible to be religiously exclusive and at the same time socially inclusive. Is there some way that we can differ in our religious views of the common good in society while we still live and work together in good harmony for the well-being of that society? Or is that impossible or even unwanted? What if one considers the other's worldview not simply as erroneous but as truly dangerous to society or even as evil? Are there ways to mediate between Rousseau's opposites?

1 Interview with Jason Walters in 'De ongelofelijke podcast', *Nederlandse Publieke Omroep (NPO) Radio 1/EO*, episode 10, podcast audio, 9 August 2019, accessed 6 December 2021, <https://podcast.npo.nl/feed/de-ongelofelijke-podcast.xml>, and in 'Argos', *NPO/Radio 1*, September 29, 2018, 14.00–15.00, accessed 6 December 2021, <https://www.nporadio1.nl/uitzendingen/argos/d1201460-1796-459b-b332-e6373e5027b1/2018-09-29-argos>.

2 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Penguin Great Ideas (Harlow: Penguin Books, 2004), ch. 8, pt. 4.



The Contribution of this Book

The question of exclusiveness and inclusiveness has been discussed extensively in different kinds of literature in many ways.³ This book's contribution is unique for several reasons. Firstly, inquiring into the relationship between, on the one hand, exclusive beliefs and, on the other hand, the (post)modern pursuit of an all-inclusive society is a more or less unique element. Secondly, we present here a much needed and asked for multidisciplinary approach with participants primarily from the Christian tradition, but also from Islam and Judaism. It is meant as a contribution to Christian theology, but with the strong belief that Christian theology cannot be done in isolation and needs to interact with other beliefs and worldviews, especially monotheistic traditions. Thirdly, it is not intended as a one-dimensional multireligious perspective in which the particularities and unique perspectives of the three monotheistic religions are watered down or blended into one monotheistic view. The discussion starts from distinct worldviews and textual traditions⁴ with, however, the ultimate intention of finding a way of living together with these sometimes-opposing differences. Finally, the unique contribution of this book is that it is a hermeneutical enterprise aiming to understand difficult exclusive texts and contexts in relation to each other concerning the boundaries of the religious community and its beliefs.

Terminology

Before we can try to answer the question of how exclusive faith relates to an inclusive society/inclusive living, we should first clarify our terminology. Exclusion, exclusivism, and exclusivity and inclusion, inclusivism, or inclusivity have different meanings in different contexts. There are at least three areas.

1. Religious exclusivism and inclusivism, concerning (eternal) salvation.

3 Within Christian Theology mainly in missiological literature, see Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans/Geneva: WCC Publications, 1989). See also Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996) and Miroslav Volf, *Allah. A Christians Response* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

4 For simplicity we use the concept 'world-view', without pretending that we are dealing with clear-cut fixed models or systems. It is about a perspective on reality, a framework with which we look at the present. A good alternative concept is 'social imaginaries', see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

2. Epistemological exclusivism and inclusivism, concerning truth (regarding religion).
3. Relational exclusivism and inclusivism, concerning living together in society/social relations.

1. Religious Terminology, Concerning (Eternal) Salvation

The classical way of describing the different *Christian*⁵ approaches to other religions is the distinction of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.⁶ Paul Hedges emphasizes that these categories are not meant as a fixed type of approach; they are much more fluid, sometimes overlap, and can each cover a range of ideas.⁷ Therefore, it is better to speak of exclusivisms, inclusivisms, and pluralisms. There are many varieties of each category and people can find themselves in more than one. Nevertheless, the framework helps to clarify some of the issues that are at stake here. It is also important to realize that the main issue addressed in Christian exclusivism is that of salvation. How are people being saved, eternally, and how do we know? Here we simply give a brief summary and overview of the meaning of these different approaches, not an extensive discussion on the differences.⁸

In this context exclusivism refers in essence to the conviction that Jesus Christ is the unique revelation of God and salvation is only through personal faith in Him, as mediated by the Bible as the only true revelation of God. People who do not know Christ personally are lost.⁹ Inclusivism agrees to a certain extent with the fact that God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ as the saviour of the world, but people from other faiths might or can be saved, for instance by obeying the natural law of God, because somehow God has revealed himself directly to people or because people who believe in a God or are religious can be considered anonymous Christians since Christ died

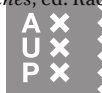
5 Developed as a perspective in Christian theology/missiology, it can also be adapted as model for other worldviews/religions.

6 The terminology was introduced by Alan Race in 1983 in *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1993); see Paul Hedges, 'A Reflection on Typologies: Negotiating a Fast-Moving Discussion', in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (London: SCM Press, 2008), 17–33 (p. 17).

7 Hedges, 'Typologies', 27.

8 That is the reason we primarily use Race and Hedges, *Christian Approaches* here as the basic textbook, as it offers a useful summary of the different approaches, even though there are many other publications that could be referenced.

9 Hedges, 'Typologies', 17, 18. Daniel Strange, 'Exclusivisms: "Indeed Their Rock is Not like Our Rock"', in *Christian Approaches*, ed. Race and Hedges, 36–62 (pp. 36–37).



for the whole world.¹⁰ Inclusivism, according to David Cheetham, tries to make sense of both ‘Christ as the unique and normative revelation of God’ and ‘God’s universal salvific will’.¹¹

Finally, pluralism suggests that many or any believer from most or all religions will be saved if they are strongly committed to their own traditions.¹² Theologically most religions are on equal footing with Christianity and ‘testify to the same ultimate transcendent reality’, albeit in different forms and beliefs.¹³

This framework has been critiqued by many.¹⁴ According to some, there are more than three options. Others argue that there are fewer options. Yet others find that religions are forced into a Christian framework or think that the terms are polemical, while others think that the focus should be on religious rituals and actions.¹⁵ Hedges acknowledges the limitations of the classification but emphasizes its usefulness in a *theologia religionum*. Two things should be kept in mind. First of all, the framework is *descriptive*, describing what different Christian positions themselves state about the religious other.¹⁶ Secondly, most theologies of religion themselves have focused upon the notion of salvation, trying to understand who is ‘inside’ and who is ‘outside’ of the religious community.¹⁷ Clearly, this model cannot describe all possible ways of viewing the religious other in all aspects, as Dirk-Martin Grube will also show (see Chapter 2). As long as we do not stretch the model and acknowledge it simplifies reality in many ways, it can be helpful in ordering different Christian perspectives on the religious other. It is still ‘the most widely known and used approach’.¹⁸

There is a fourth category, called ‘particularities’, although some claim that it is simply an extrapolation of the previous three categories. It is a

10 Hedges, ‘Typologies’, 18.

11 David Cheetham, ‘Inclusivisms: Honouring Faithfulness and Openness’, in *Christian Approaches*, ed. Race and Hedges, 63–84 (p. 63).

12 Hedges, ‘Typologies’, 18.

13 Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Pluralisms: How to Appreciate Religious Diversity Theologically’, in *Christian Approaches*, ed. Race and Hedges, 85–110 (p. 88).

14 See Hedges, ‘Typologies’, 18–22.

15 For eight different criticisms in detail, see Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology – Clarified and Reaffirmed’, in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 13–27.

16 Hedges, ‘Typologies’, 20.

17 Hedges, ‘Typologies’, 20.

18 See Hedges, ‘Typologies’, 30. Kärkkäinen uses different terminology for more or less the same categories, namely ‘ecclesiocentrism’, ‘christocentrism’, and ‘theocentrism or realitycentrism’. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 23–26.



more postmodern interpretation that emphasizes the ‘distinct or particular nature’ of every religion and rejects the existence or significance of so-called cross-cultural categories, like religion, religious experience, or salvation.¹⁹ It is not possible to understand different religions in terms of one religion only. Every religion needs to be interpreted from its own context and in its own right. This approach combines aspects of all other categories but ‘rejects pluralism’ that speaks of universals and dismisses inclusivism, because inclusivism assumes that every religion is the same in essence. At the same time, it cannot be seen as exclusivism, for according to the category of ‘particularities’, God is universal. It combines several elements, claiming that each faith is unique, it is only possible to speak from a specific tradition, and that the Holy Spirit may be at work in other faiths. Although there is no salvation in other faiths, they are still somehow involved in God’s plans for humanity. ‘Particularities’ is based in a postmodern and postliberal worldview; the orthodox doctrines of trinity and Christ are foundational for a particularist’s theology of religions.²⁰

2. Epistemological Terminology, Concerning Truth

Obviously, all these different perspectives are exclusive in the sense that they exclude the other perspectives. Pluralism is as exclusive as exclusivism. Believing that all people of every religion will be saved through their own faith conflicts with the belief that salvation is only through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Those are mutually exclusive truth claims. Here exclusivism refers to the ‘epistemological fact that each proposition, if true, excludes the truth of its logical opposite’.²¹

Either Muḥammad is God’s messenger and the Qur’ān God’s divine revelation, or they are not. Either Christ is the divine Son of God, or he is not.

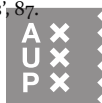
In the same way, all views are in some sense inclusivistic, indicating that theologians of one religion assess other religions ‘in terms and concepts of their own religion’.²² Others are included into the framework of one’s own, for example Christian, worldview. Apart from the question of whether that is possible at all, it is a form of hermeneutical inclusivism.

19 Hedges, ‘Typologies’, 29; Hedges, ‘Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives’, in *Christian Approaches*, ed. Race and Hedges, 112–35 (p. 112).

20 Hedges, ‘Particularities’, 112–13. With this category Hedges refers to many different views from quite a variety of different voices, from Gavin D’Costa to Lesslie Newbigin and Alister McGrath.

21 Schmidt-Leukel, ‘Pluralisms’, 87.

22 Schmidt Leukel, ‘Pluralisms’, 87.



The notions ‘exclusion’ and ‘inclusion’ can therefore be used to refer to issues of truth and falsehood in religion. Even though this has impact on and is related to questions of salvation, the different perspectives are not identical. In his contribution, Grube (Chapter 2) will delve deeper into the different ways exclusivism and inclusivism are used in relation to both salvation and truth and into the possibilities and obstacles of using and applying these terms.

3. Relational Terminology, Concerning Social Relations and Mechanisms

Thirdly, exclusivism and inclusivism also relate to different processes in society in which people are either included in or excluded from certain groups and societies. Exclusivism is the attitude and action in which certain people are not allowed to participate in a group or society as a whole or consequently do not have equal rights with others, for instance with those in power. Inclusivism indicates the pursuit of a society in which people are welcome as they are and in which there is space for everyone, regardless of religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, colour, or ability. Here our focus is on social relations, not on religious or ethical truth categories.

Social inclusivism does not, however, exist without a form of exclusivism. Inclusion is impossible without exclusion, for without exclusion there is no need to speak about inclusion, since all are simply part of the group. Sometimes exclusion is even desired in order to preserve an inclusive society, for instance when it comes to destructive evil. In the Netherlands, for instance, exclusion from government funding is required whenever organizations discriminate against their workers on the basis of religion or gender. Such organizations could even be prosecuted in court. In the same way, a corrupt lawyer will be banned from the bar, a teacher with improper relationships with minors in their class will be expelled, and a football player who perpetrates a serious foul is dealt a red card. Inclusion needs exclusion and vice versa.

The main question of whether exclusive belief and inclusive living go together is therefore not simply about promoting either exclusiveness or inclusiveness, but it concerns exploring what kind of exclusivity and inclusivity we wish for. Total inclusivity is not possible or desired at any of the three interpretative levels of exclusivism/inclusivism mentioned above (salvation, truth, and social relations), and the same is true for total exclusion.

In this book all three areas somehow interlock. When we ask if it is possible to be religiously exclusive and socially inclusive, we express the idea that a certain ‘worldview’ or ‘religion’ always implies a certain (exclusive)



position on how to interpret reality, the meaning of life, and the problem(s) in the world (truth). That in turn also impacts possible solutions to these problems (salvation). It does not matter whether these solutions focus on the ordering of society and the salvation of this world, or on the eternal salvation of people and creation. Opposing worldviews in this respect are related to truth claims, which in turn impact the approach to people with different worldviews and to the question of whether others can be included in the way we address life issues. If one group, for instance, really believes that the salvation of our earth depends on radical interventions because of climate change, it will be difficult to accept the group that rejects the problem altogether. Since it is a matter of life and death, the approach that does not lead to survival but to perceived destruction will not be tolerated. This has been at issue concerning the recent approach to the spread of Covid-19 and the issues of ignoring or infringing certain rights. The same mechanism applies to eternal salvation: truth must be preached or implemented. And, to name another aspect, if the honour of God is at stake, for instance in implementing certain divinely ordered laws, compromise becomes problematic and may even be perceived as a case of apostasy.²³

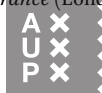
Monotheistic Dilemma?

All worldviews or social imaginaries are to a certain extent exclusive in the first and second sense of the meaning. As a perceived expression of truth based on a certain worldview or interpretation of good and bad – either in relation to the present time or eternity – they exclude other options. Still, it is sometimes argued that monotheistic religions are particularly problematic. As Selina O’Grady says,

Traditionalists believe that their religion contains the essential truths and is the answer to all the world’s evils. Their role is to restore it to its purest form by faithfully following a literalist reading of scripture, and in the case of Muslims by imposing sharia and returning the world to the way it was under Muḥammad in the seventh century. Believing that they possess the sole truth, fundamentalists/traditionalists tend to be intolerant of those with different opinions and interpretations.²⁴

²³ Cf. the research of Dijkhuizen and Barentsen, Chapter 16 of this volume.

²⁴ Selina O’Grady, *In the Name of God: The Role of Religion in the Modern World: A History of Judeo-Christian and Islamic Tolerance* (London: Atlantic Books, 2020), 405.



For O'Grady, traditionalists are not just (violent) extremists but committed orthodox believers. It could of course be true of all fundamentalisms, religious or not, but O'Grady is specifically thinking of monotheistic traditionalism. Since there is only one God and his revelation contains the truth, it is difficult to leave room for other convictions. In an interview in a Dutch newspaper, she said, 'Monotheistic religions have intolerance built into the system. By definition this one God is a jealous God, whether He is called Jahweh, Allah or Father. There is no room for competitors, tolerance is impossible.'²⁵ It is not easy to negotiate over the truth with the Creator of the universe, you simply do not compromise with God. Paul Cliteur has called this the Monotheistic Dilemma.²⁶ He tries to show that religious terrorism flows from a certain monotheistic logic. The monotheistic dilemma is the question of whether believers should obey the laws of their country or should stick to the laws of the religious community that have been dictated by a supranational God.²⁷ According to Cliteur, these can never go together. That is in a different way the same opposition Rousseau describes when he talks about the damned neighbour.

Apart from the question as to whether these descriptions are fair presentations of the essence of monotheism, in the context of exclusiveness and inclusiveness, the suspicion that monotheism is geared towards violent exclusivism is deeply problematic (and outdated in light of more recent discussion). There are several reasons for that. First of all, the tendency to violent exclusiveness is not restricted to monotheism but applies to every worldview, as Karen Armstrong has made clear.²⁸ It is not too difficult to find examples of very violent intolerant polytheism, as in the Roman Empire with its many gods and deities. Those who rejected the Hellenistic Pantheon, like Jews and Christians, often faced intolerant persecution. Secondly, the supposed tension between the divine and the mundane order of things is not expressed only in violent ways. Many Salafi Muslims, for instance, who are in general considered quite 'traditional' or 'fundamentalistic', reject political and military involvement in any way.²⁹ The same can be said for the Christian Amish communities. And what might be said of monasteries and cloisters

25 Herman Veenhof, 'Vervolgden werden vervolgers. Monotheïstische religies hebben volgens auteur O'Grady een ingebouwde onverdraagzaamheid', *Nederlands Dagblad*, 6 February 2021, 17.

26 Paul Cliteur, *Het monotheïstisch dilemma* (Amsterdam/Antwerpen: De Arbeiderspers, 2020).

27 Cliteur, *Dilemma*, 17.

28 Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (New York: Anchor Books, 2015).

29 See Joas Wagemakers, 'Salafism', *Oxford Research Encyclopedias. Religion*, published online 2016, accessed 17 November 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.255>.

throughout history, where Christians (and Muslims) have withdrawn from ordinary life to be non-violently devoted to the Divine world?

We can conclude that there is indeed a tension. Yet it is seriously misconstrued by Cliteur and others as being characteristic for monotheism. It is a much larger problem of which monotheism is only a subspecies. It is the dilemma between an exclusive worldview, on the one hand, and the pursuit of an inclusive society, on the other. How do we tolerate those who oppose our view(s), or what we absolutely believe to be good and healthy for our world? How can we accept and live in peace with someone who according to my (religious) worldview is a threat to the flourishing or even survival of society?

Monotheistically Transcending the Monotheistic Dilemma?

In this context Rabbi Jonathan Sacks takes a position exactly opposite to the idea of the monotheistic dilemma. He is convinced that monotheism is the only real solution to the problem of antagonism, exclusivism, and even (religious) violence. ‘Nothing could be more alien to the spirit of Abrahamic monotheism than what is happening today in the name of jihad.’³⁰ For Sacks, monotheism is the way to transcend the persistent dualism between good and evil, between us and them, that has always been present in the world. Such dualism is typically human rather than religious³¹ and a cheap way out of the complexity of life.³² The human dilemma is that we are all very different and at the same connected in tribes and groups. Those tribes clash. The simplest way out of that complexity is dualism, a simple division between good (us) and evil (the others). If we want to overcome that dualism, we need something that transcends this dualism. According to monotheism, it is the transcendent God who is able to do that and transcend our particularity. As creator, God is universal.³³ God is not just our God, but the ‘God of all’.³⁴ Monotheism forces us to learn to handle complexity.

This last approach is interesting and promising for our task here, but Sacks is quite selective in his approach to religion. He mainly focuses on different stories in the book of Genesis, such as the story of Ismail and Isaac,

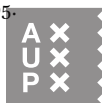
30 Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016), 203.

31 Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, 101.

32 Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, 53.

33 Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, 194–95.

34 Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, 205.



Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers, and concludes that ‘God may choose, but *God does not reject*’ (italics in the original).³⁵ God’s choice for the one does not imply the rejection of the other. God seems to have favourites, but Sacks shows from a rereading of these stories that this is not true. These stories are, according to Sacks, constructed to say exactly the opposite. By their rhetoric power, we become sympathetic to the ones who are left out, and we find God on our side precisely in God’s care for the lost and rejected.³⁶

By focusing one-sidedly only on these texts, however, Sacks ignores other parts of the Tanakh, where we read quite different stories that precisely seem to promote dualism and antagonism. It is not easy to make the same point from these passages as Sacks does from the Genesis stories. In different places it seems that the Bible takes the side of the oppressors or condones and orders violent aggression and even what we today would call genocide.³⁷ And even in the parts Sacks does discuss in Genesis, he draws quick conclusions and does not make clear how inclusion would apply to those within and outside of Israel who continue to resist the Holy One of Israel.

All of this shows the need for a careful reading of texts. One of these texts, which we will discuss in this volume, is Deut. 17:2–7, where God seems to order the stoning of idolators, who are in fact apostates. In Chapter 5 Joep Dubbink and Klaas Spronk present a careful reading of this passage.

Apostasy

For the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, apostasy is a difficult reality. In all three religions it is considered an (almost) unforgivable act should believers decide to leave their faith and their faith community. It is liable to capital punishment.³⁸ It is thus in danger of becoming an extremist form of exclusivism. We have chosen to make the question of apostasy the starting point for our research. There are several reasons for this choice.

1. Apostasy is an ultimate test case for the tension between inclusion and exclusion. Apostasy in itself is a form of exclusion (on the level of social relations): the apostate excludes themselves from the

35 Sacks, *Not in God’s Name*, 124.

36 Sacks, *Not in God’s Name*, 103 and chs. 6–9.

37 See Michael Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

38 Deut. 13; 17:2–7. For Islamic sources, see Chapter 12 of this volume: Razi H. Quadir, ‘Apostasy in Islam: A Review of Sources and Positions’.



community and does not want to be part of it and excludes the community from their life and convictions. It always raises the question of how relationships do or do not continue. It is of course also related to the question of truth: the apostate rejects (part of) the truth the community holds and the apostate's new truth is rejected by the community. According to the community, that must have consequences in terms of salvation.

2. The death penalty that is required by different passages in the Tanakh and in Islamic texts is the most exclusive form of social and religious exclusion (on the level of salvation and social relations). It eliminates the person from the community and even from life itself. This leads to crucial questions about God, God's (relation with) people, and living together in society. If this were the response God required, then that only intensifies Rousseau's problem of the damned neighbour. And it seems to strengthen the idea of a monotheistic dilemma or the conviction that monotheistic religions cannot accommodate inclusion. Looking at this form of exclusion might help us answer the question of whether that is true and whether it is a problem. Is inclusion the ultimate goal? What kind of inclusion are we talking about and what are the limits to inclusion?
3. The case of punishment and apostasy is clearly present in the history of the Christian Church. In different phases, the church has responded differently to people who left the Christian faith and the Christian community, varying from banning them from the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, to handing them over to the legal authorities for (capital) punishment. An important question in the first centuries concerned whether the so called lapsi – those who had fallen away from Christ under severe pressure and persecution – should be accepted again into the community after repentance.³⁹ But – to be clear – falling away under severe pressure is different from cases like that of Salman Rushdie.
4. Apostasy is an important issue in the relationship between Christianity and Islam. Apostasy in traditional Islamic thinking is very problematic. Even though today there are different interpretations among Muslim scholars, the death penalty is still considered by many as the true response to apostasy in an Islamic state. Many (Sunni) law schools require the death penalty.⁴⁰ That is particularly important due to the

39 See B. J. Oropeza, *Paul and Apostasy: Eschatology, Perseverance and Falling Away in the Corinthian Congregation*, WUNT ser. 2, 115 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), ch. 1.1, 1–33.

40 For an overview of Islamic approaches to apostasy, see Quadir, Chapter 12 of this volume.

situation of many Muslims who leave their religion or want to follow Jesus. Their situation in the world is extremely difficult,⁴¹ although there are several exceptions. It is, however, unfair for Christians to discuss these issues with Muslims without looking at similar ideas in the texts within their own tradition. There also seems to be an internal Christian inconsistency/divergence, as these exclusive passages do not seem to align with the commandment to love one's neighbour and with the instruction in the sermon on the mount to love even one's enemy and to pray for those who persecute the believers (Matt. 5:44, cf. Rom. 12:14).

5. In the history of Christianity, we come across different stories of exclusion. After the Reconquista of the Islamic parts of Spain undertaken by the Christian community, Muslims (and Jews) were faced with the choice between conversion (baptism), leaving Spain, or the death penalty.⁴² When comparing Islamic and Christian responses to apostasy, it is important to be aware of differences in religious and social contexts. Interpretations of the relations between religion and state, religion and ethnicity, and individuals and the community are important for the way people understand and apply their tradition.

Textual Traditions in Context

We have chosen to approach the issue of exclusion and inclusion through three different types of (re)sources: 1) social and philosophical; 2) textual; and 3) practice-related. At first, textual approaches seem fundamental, since holy books form the roots of monotheistic religious traditions and hold the divine principles of (eternal) life. Therefore, they could be seen as decisive in the ordering of the religious life, of the framework of exclusion and inclusion. That is why the examination of textual traditions are a major element within this volume, particularly in Part 2, with an exclusive text on apostasy to start with (Deut. 17:2–7) followed by other Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts.

41 Ziya Meral, *No Place to Call Home: Experiences of Apostates from Islam and Failures of International Community* (London: Christian Solidarity Worldwide, 2008). Ibn Warraq, *Leaving Islam. Apostates Speak Out* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003).

42 See Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 318–19; Maurits S. Berger, *A Brief History of Islam in Europe: Thirteen Centuries of Creed, Conflict and Coexistence* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2014), 76, 126–27.

However, texts are just one source that influence our understanding of our world. There are other dynamics that are important. Cultural, historical, and social contexts influence the way people deal with exclusion and inclusion, and that in turn also influences the reading of texts. In more community-oriented cultures that centre on honour and shame, apostasy seems to be more problematic than in some more individualistically oriented societies that focus on guilt and forgiveness.⁴³ In democratically governed communities, the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion are different from societies with tribal power structures and hierarchies, where, for instance, the position of minorities is much more vulnerable than in democratic societies. There is little room to deviate from the group values and perspectives. Because of all this, social and philosophical ‘sources’ are also looked at even before we address exclusive textual traditions on exclusion and inclusion. In this way, we explore the logical and sociological frameworks with which we read texts.

Finally, traditions are also received and applied in different contexts, and therefore our third (re)source is practice-related approaches. They illustrate and instruct us on how certain mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion today are related to religious traditions and how deviant interpretations are sometimes considered as cases of apostasy.

We have chosen to look at exclusive texts and mechanisms. This is a deliberate choice, although not an easy one. Those texts are often avoided out of fear of encouraging intolerance and conflict. However, these texts represent exclusive religious beliefs and can be important obstacles for living together in peace. They highlight irresolvable differences between one religious group and others and assume an ‘us versus them’ approach. If that is the (divine) norm, it will be very hard even to consider inclusive societies. So, if we want to see how exclusion relates to inclusion and if both could go together, it is more rewarding to start with exclusive worldviews and address exclusive texts and mechanisms. Obviously, inclusive traditions that emphasize the unity of mankind and the universality of salvation seem better equipped to further positive relationships between different religious communities. However, the problem lies with the exclusive texts and traditions. If we fail to address them properly, they will continue to provide an obstacle to a thorough view on exclusivity and inclusivity. This is why we have decided to address them.

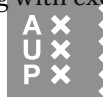
43 See Robert Ermers, *Honor Related Violence: A New Social Psychological Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2018) and *Eer en Eerwraak: Definitie en Analyse* (Amsterdam: Bulaaq, 2007).

Overview of the Book

Our research operates in concentric circles, starting with the theme of apostasy in certain exclusive texts, widening it to other issues of exclusion and inclusion to then end with a number of practice-related examples. In Part 1, we have chosen to start with the social and philosophical approaches. The reason is that we never approach texts in a vacuum, and it is helpful to be aware of mechanisms and understandings that influence both our interaction with texts and traditions and our practices. In the context of reconstructing religious exclusivism in humble ways, Dirk-Martin Grube discusses the value and interpretation of the terminology of exclusion and inclusion (Chapter 2), Robert Ermers looks at social psychological aspects of responses to apostasy and exclusion (Chapter 3), while Jack Barentsen presents a social identity theory perspective (Chapter 4).

With that we move to the second part, which presents several studies on textual (re)sources, from Biblical texts as well as from Jewish and Islamic traditions. The reading starts with an exposition of Deut. 17:2–7, which explicitly presents the death penalty for (inciting) apostasy as a divine command. Joep Dubbink and Klaas Spronk try to understand the meaning of this passage in its context and reception history (Chapter 5). Henk Bakker then looks at how the Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus's view on apostasy, otherness, and exile (Chapter 6), while Peter-Ben Smit subsequently studies exclusion and inclusion in Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10, in relation to 'the body' (Chapter 7). Kobus Kok continues with a similar study of 1 Peter (Chapter 8) and takes into consideration the social identity complexity theory perspective as heuristic tool. Finally, Bert Jan Lietaert Peerbolte looks at the explicit reference to the Deuteronomic texts on apostasy in Heb. 10:28 (Chapter 9), where the author stresses that the punishment for dishonouring the Son of God will be even worse than that set out in Deuteronomy 17 concerning idolatry.

After Christian contributions, Jewish and Islamic perspectives follow. Leo Mock describes the Rabbinic interpretations of apostasy and exclusive texts and how they have been used in tradition (Chapter 10). Yaser Ellethy describes the theological foundations of an Islamic view on the religious other (Chapter 11) and Razi Quadir presents an overview of Islamic traditions on apostasy and their impact on Muslim–Christian relations (Chapter 12). Gé Speelman concludes this section by exploring the open letter 'A Common Word', which was addressed to the Christian community by a large number of Muslims scholars from a wide diversity of 'denominations' and movements. She explores the consequences this invitation to dialogue on peaceful coexistence has for dealing with exclusion and inclusion (Chapter 13).



The third part consists of three case studies that in one way or another are dealing with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in different contexts. Eleonora Hof presents an insight into the use of Old Testament texts in both the colonial and postcolonial discourse concerning the colonization of North America (Chapter 14). Simon Ririhena helps us with insights from the Moluccas that could possibly be a starting point for finding a way of connecting exclusivism with inclusivism today outside of the Moluccan context (Chapter 15). Finally, Laura Dijkhuizen and Jack Barentsen show how in two Evangelical Churches, the issue of women in leadership has led to mutual mechanisms of exclusion and even mutual accusations of apostasy (Chapter 16).

In the concluding part, the contributions from Dorottya Nagy (Chapter 17) and Erika Van Nes and Bernhard Reitsma (Chapter 18) try to formulate what, respectively, the missiological and theological challenges are that arise from the research and the three (re)sources/approaches. These challenges are intended for further research into the more normative aspects of exclusion and inclusion. What do the results of this volume contribute to understanding how we should live together today, with different exclusive beliefs and worldviews, if we want to prevent chaotic and violent societies? Or is that impossible? And are these contributions helpful in a diversity of contexts?

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About the author

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44 For more information on the Foundation, see 'About us', The Church in the Context of Islam, accessed 22 September 2022, www.kerk-islam.nl/en.