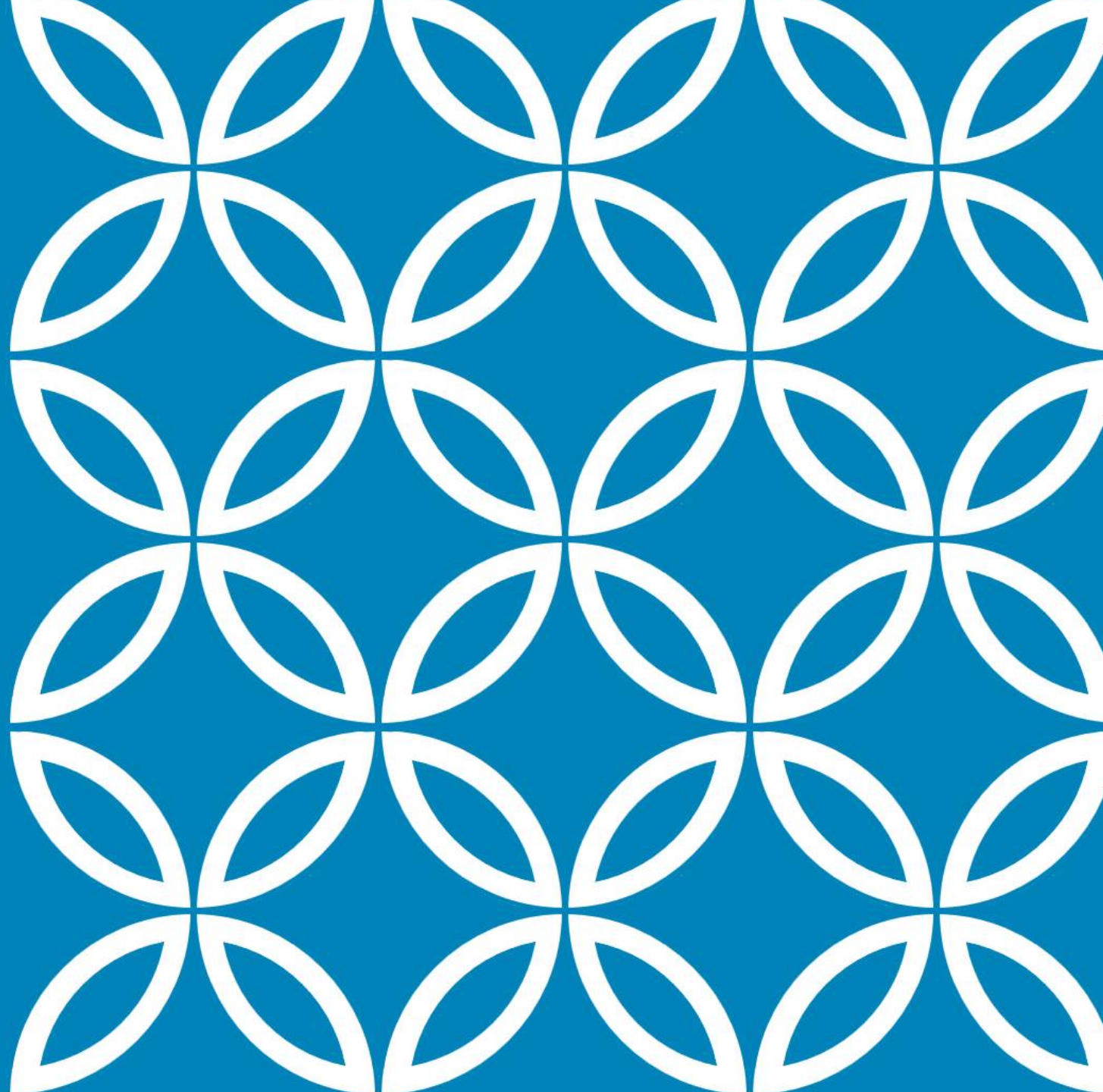
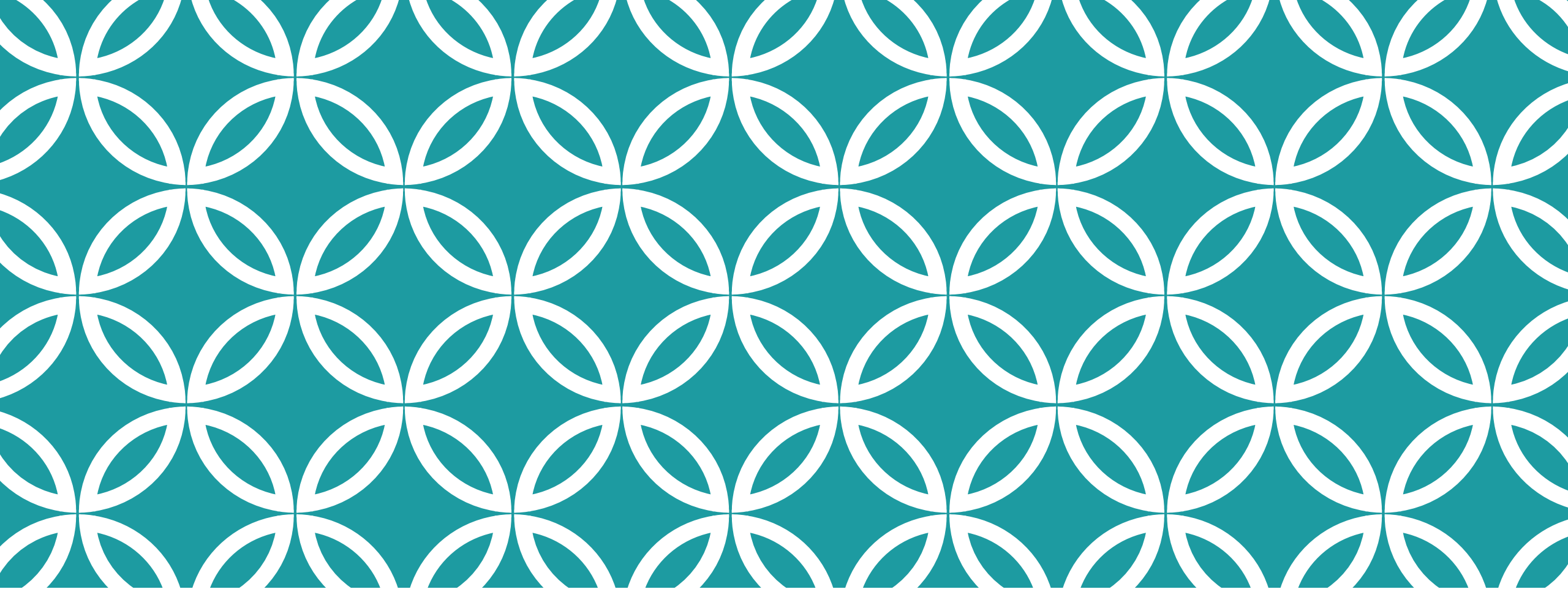


METHODS AND APPROACHES IN INTERFAITH STUDIES

Dr Angus M Slater





THE THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS





REVISION

In the last section, we looked at the genesis of the typology of the Theology of Religions, answering questions about its importance and continuing relevance for the study of interfaith matters.

We also began our exploration of the typology by looking at the first position within it — Inclusivism. We looked at the bases of the position and a variety of different approaches to it, from thinkers such as Pinnock, Kung, and Rahner.

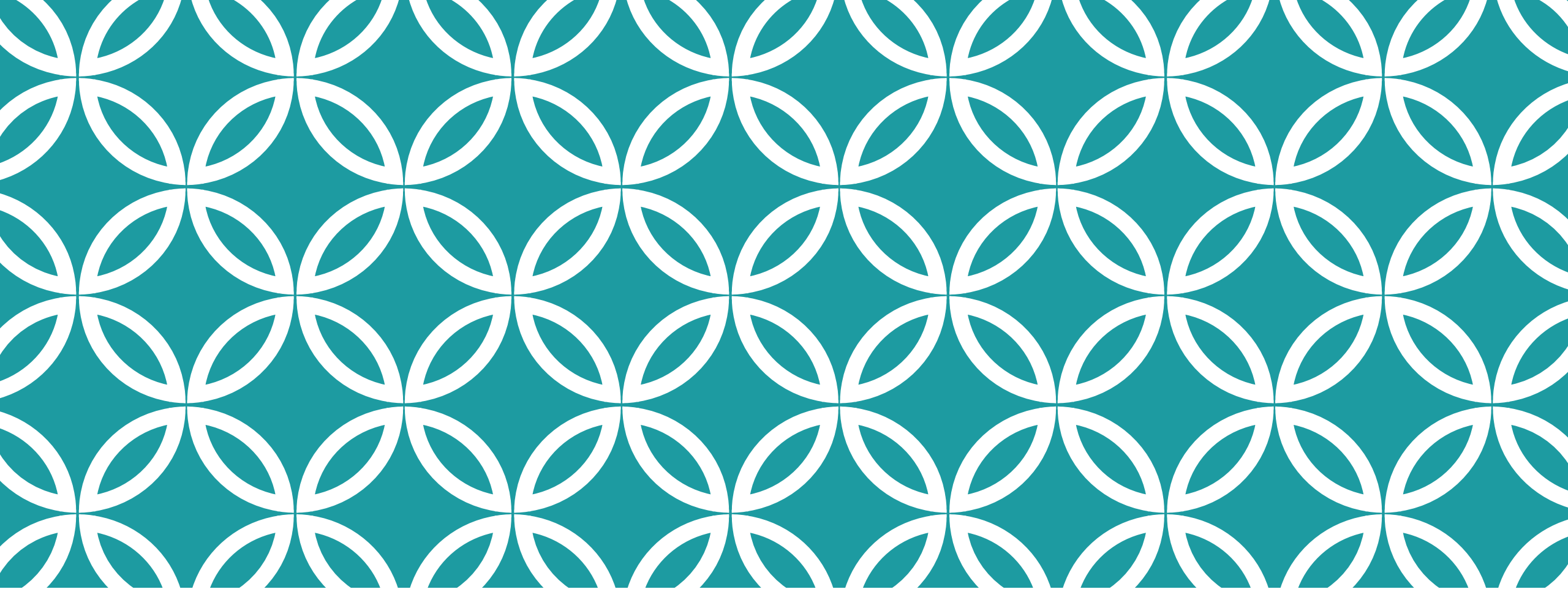


REVISION

You also had four readings to complete (Race, Race, Makransky, and Wong) which attempted to explore the position of Inclusivism in more depth.

Two of the readings (Makransky and Wong) engaged critically with the position of Inclusivism from the position of non-Christian religions – looking at how the assumptions embedded within it either work or not within non-Christian religions.

Make sure that you engage with the discussion forums on Moodle and offer up a question for reflection for the group.



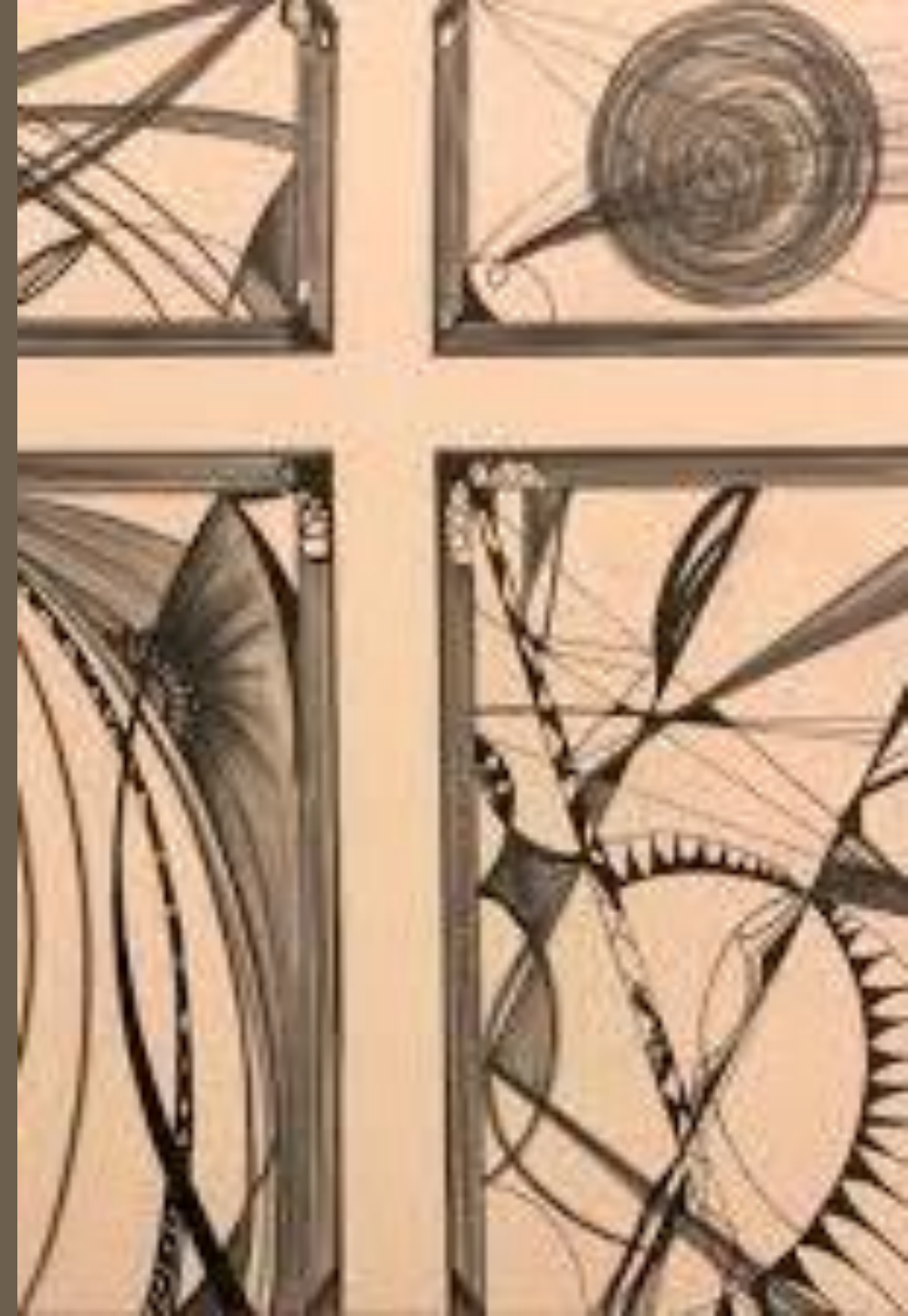
EXCLUSIVISM



EXCLUSIVISM

While Inclusivism is the position within the Christian tradition which states that those of other religions can achieve salvation, and that this salvation occurs through the work of the Christian tradition, Exclusivism is a position which states that salvation can only be achieved while being a member of the Christian tradition, however that may be defined.

Exclusivism is relatively straight forward position — membership of the Christian tradition is required for salvation.



EXCLUSIVISM

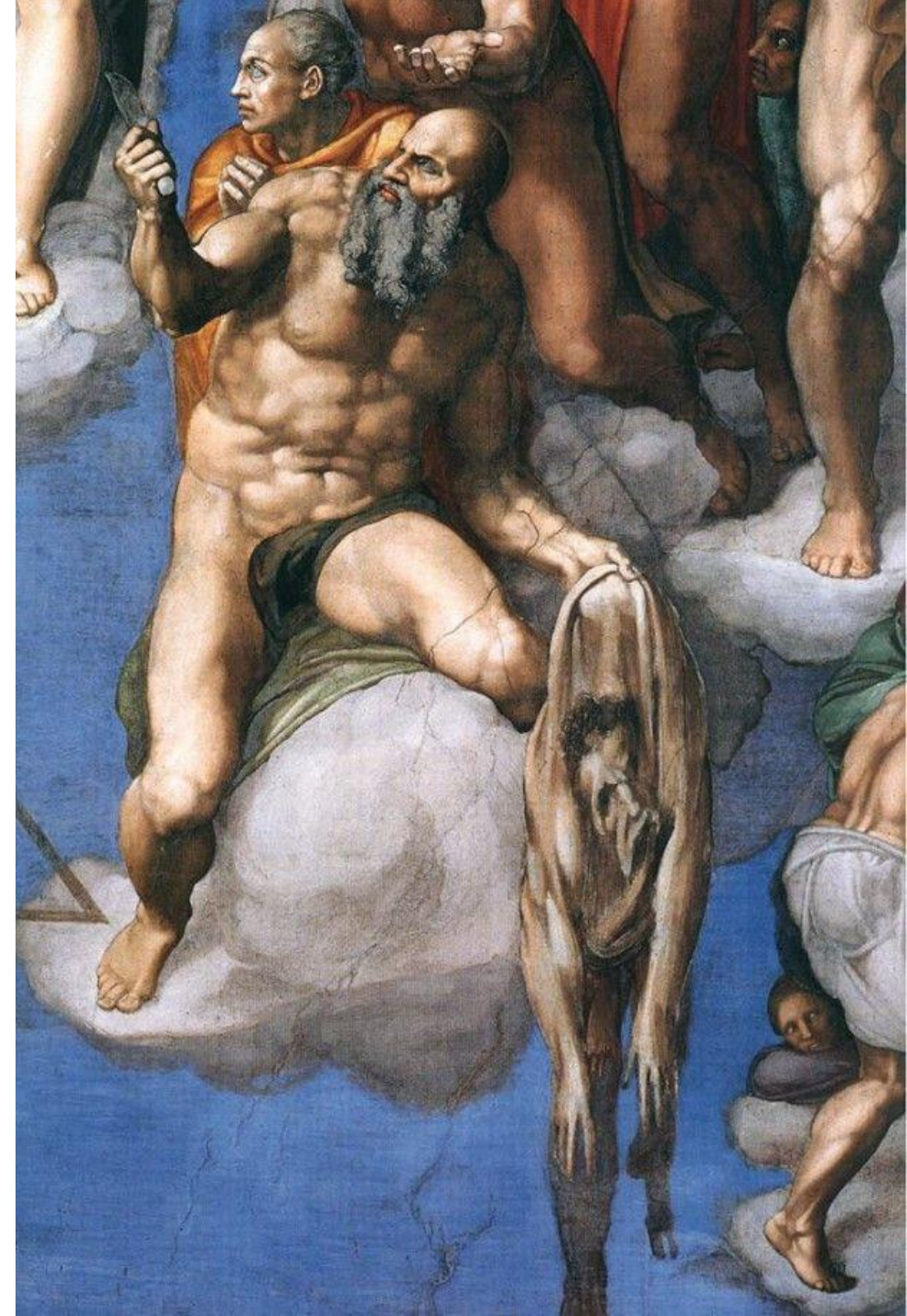
Of course, there are questions that are immediately raised for clarification:

What exactly is meant by the Christian tradition?

What exactly is meant by membership?

Why does salvation depend on these characteristics?

Generally, the exclusivist position would state that only those who have **heard Christ's teaching** and who have **received Christ's grace** will be eligible for salvation.



EXCLUSIVISM

As before with Inclusivism, it is worth considering the bases on which the position of Exclusivism is based — scripture and tradition.

Exponents of the exclusivist position might quote the words of Acts 4:12: “Salvation is to be found through Jesus alone; for there is no one else in the world, whose name God has given to men, by whom we can be saved.”

Or they might quote the words of Jesus in John 14:6: “I am the way, the truth and the life; No one comes to the Father but through me.”

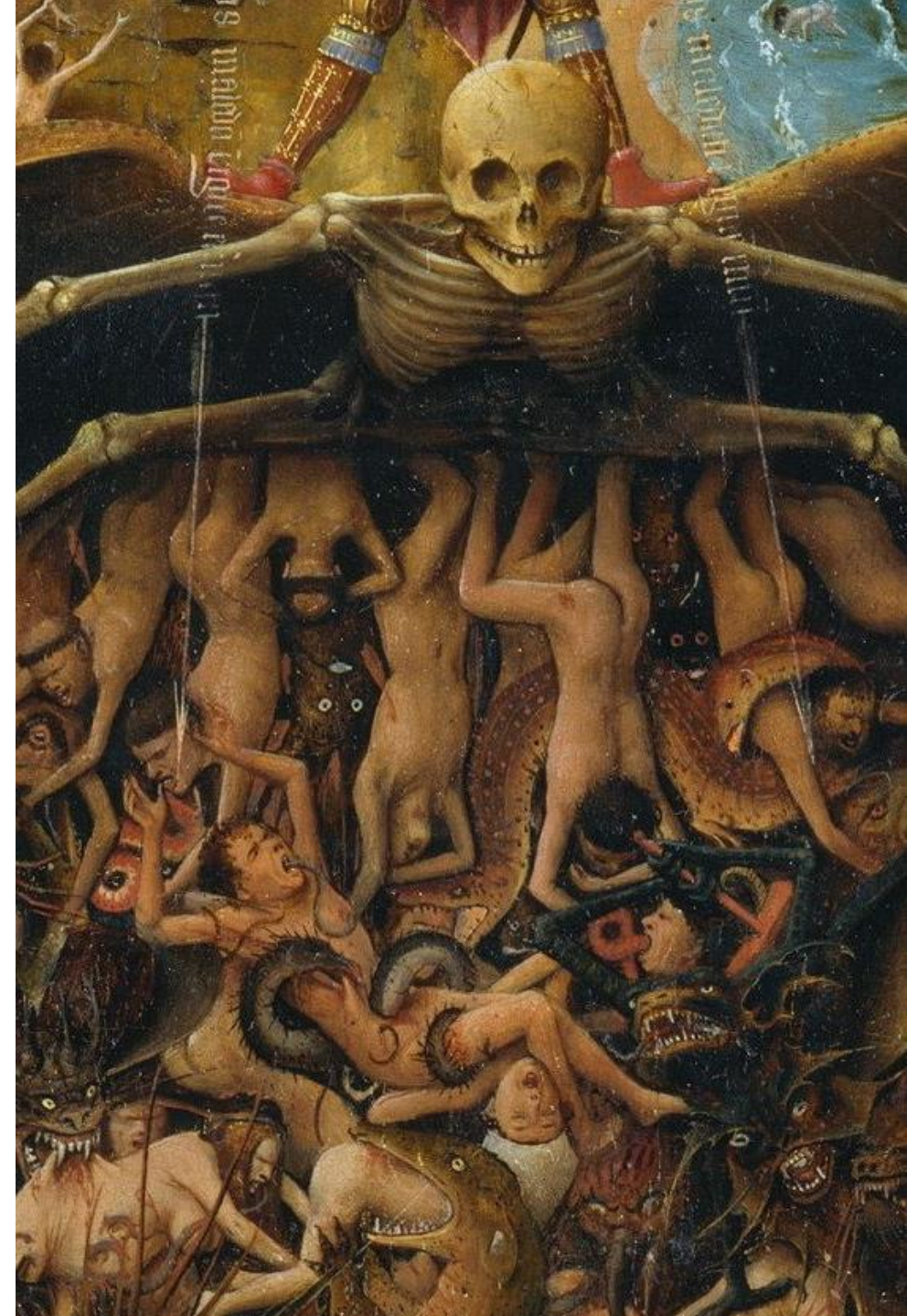


EXCLUSIVISM

Furthermore, there are plenty of texts in Christian scripture which affirm that ultimately humans will be judged, with those found unworthy not receiving salvation.

Hebrews 9:27 states: "It is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgement."

There is also a significant aspect of Christian tradition which refutes the possibility of salvation outside the Church.



EXCLUSIVISM

In addition, because of its roots as the default for much of Christian history, the definition of Exclusivism often arises as a critique of Inclusivism, as it emerges as a more common position in modernity.

It is worth examining and outlining these exclusivist critiques of Inclusivism in turn as they highlight the points of divergence between the two positions more clearly.



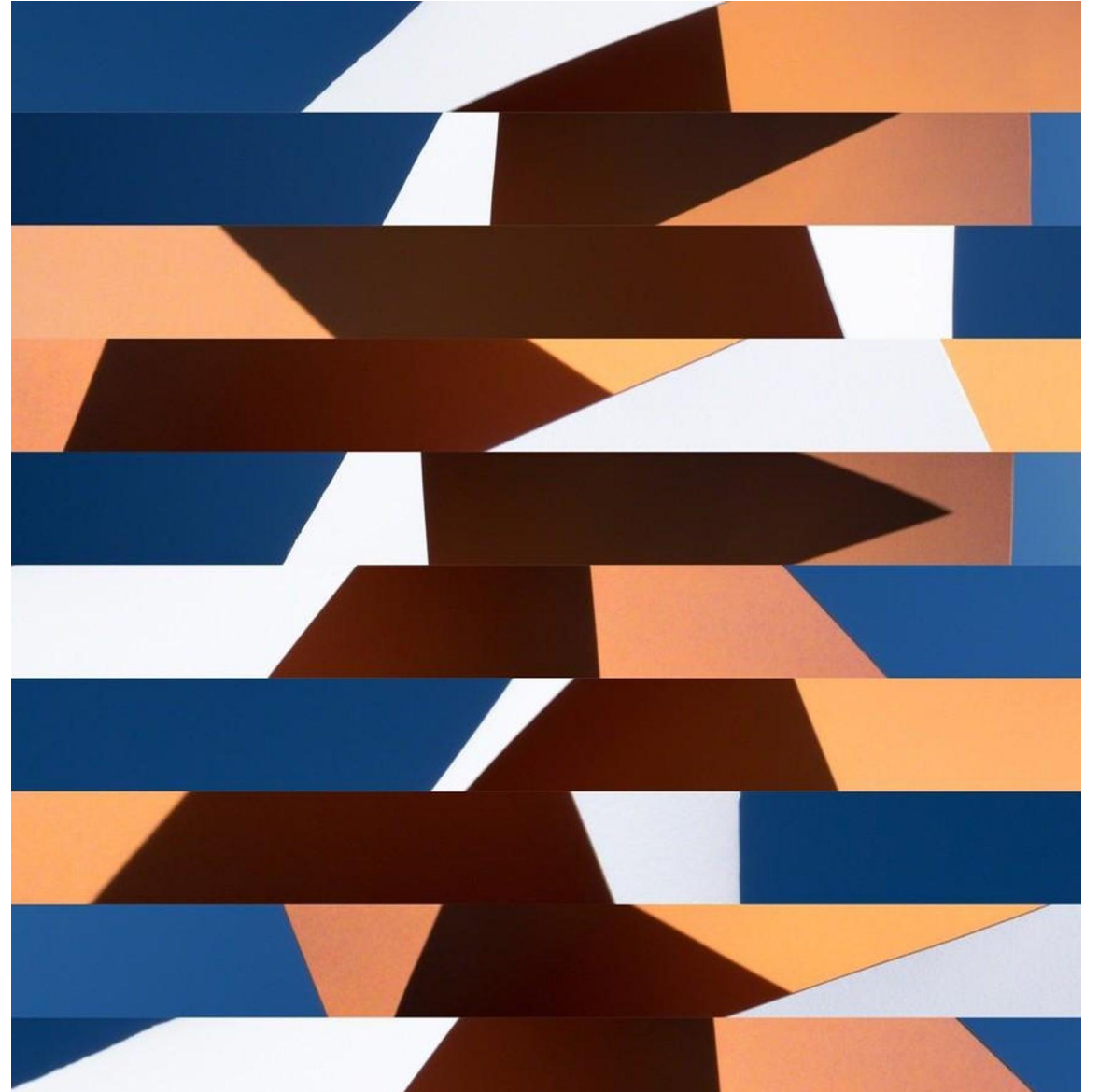
EXCLUSIVIST CRITIQUES OF INCLUSIVISM

The primary critique of Inclusivism by Exclusivist thinkers is that there is just too much ambiguity in inclusivism. There are certain key questions which an inclusivist position fails to address:

How does a religion become a vehicle for salvation?

What determines which religion will become a vehicle for salvation?

How do we know that someone in one religious tradition might be disposed to believe another religious tradition if they heard the teaching of that tradition?

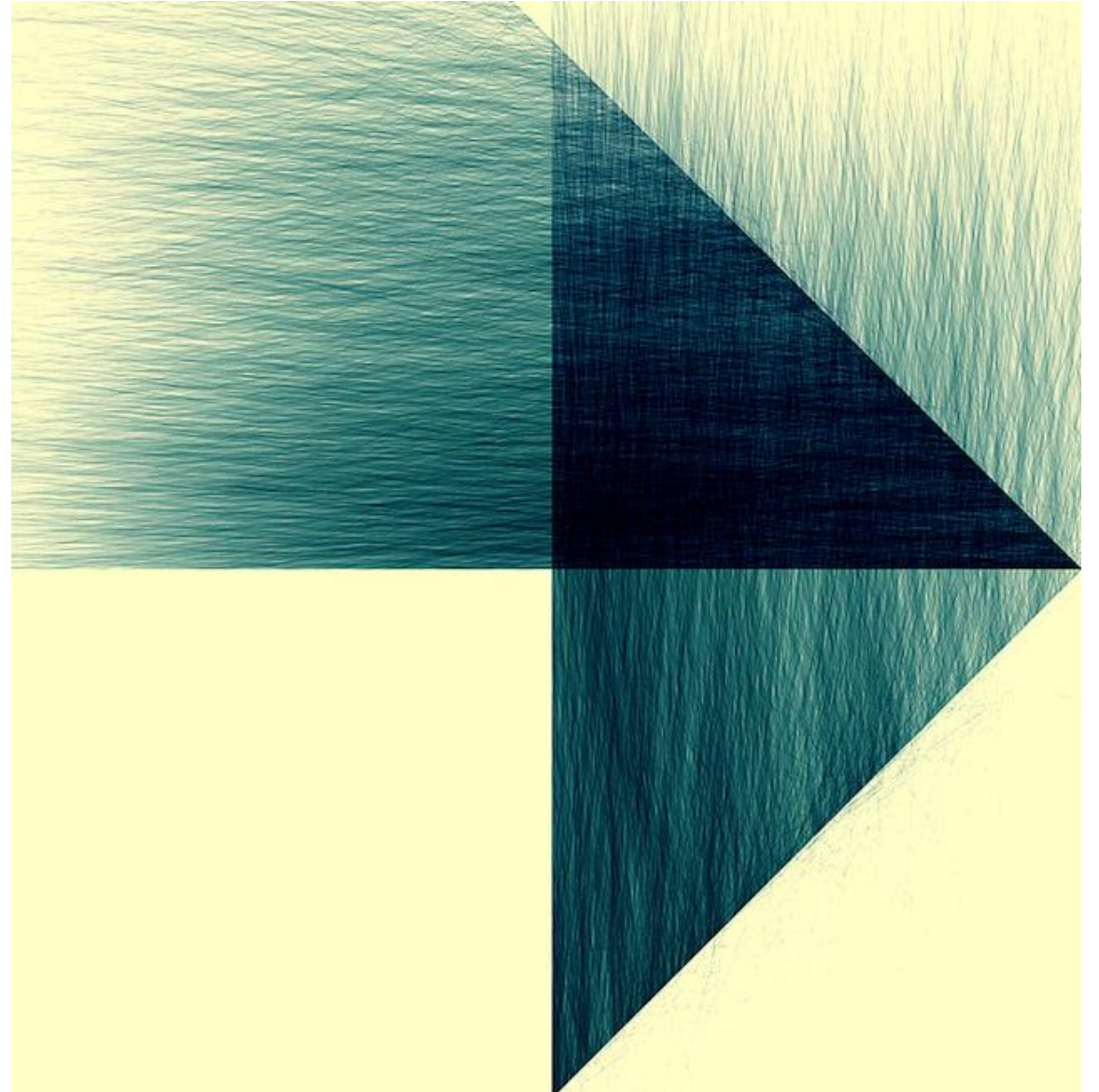


EXCLUSIVIST CRITIQUES OF INCLUSIVISM

A secondary critique is that in some ways religious inclusivism is insulting to other religious traditions e.g. Karl Rahner and anonymous Christians.

Many adherents of other traditions such as Islam or Hinduism might feel insulted by being described as an “anonymous Christian.”

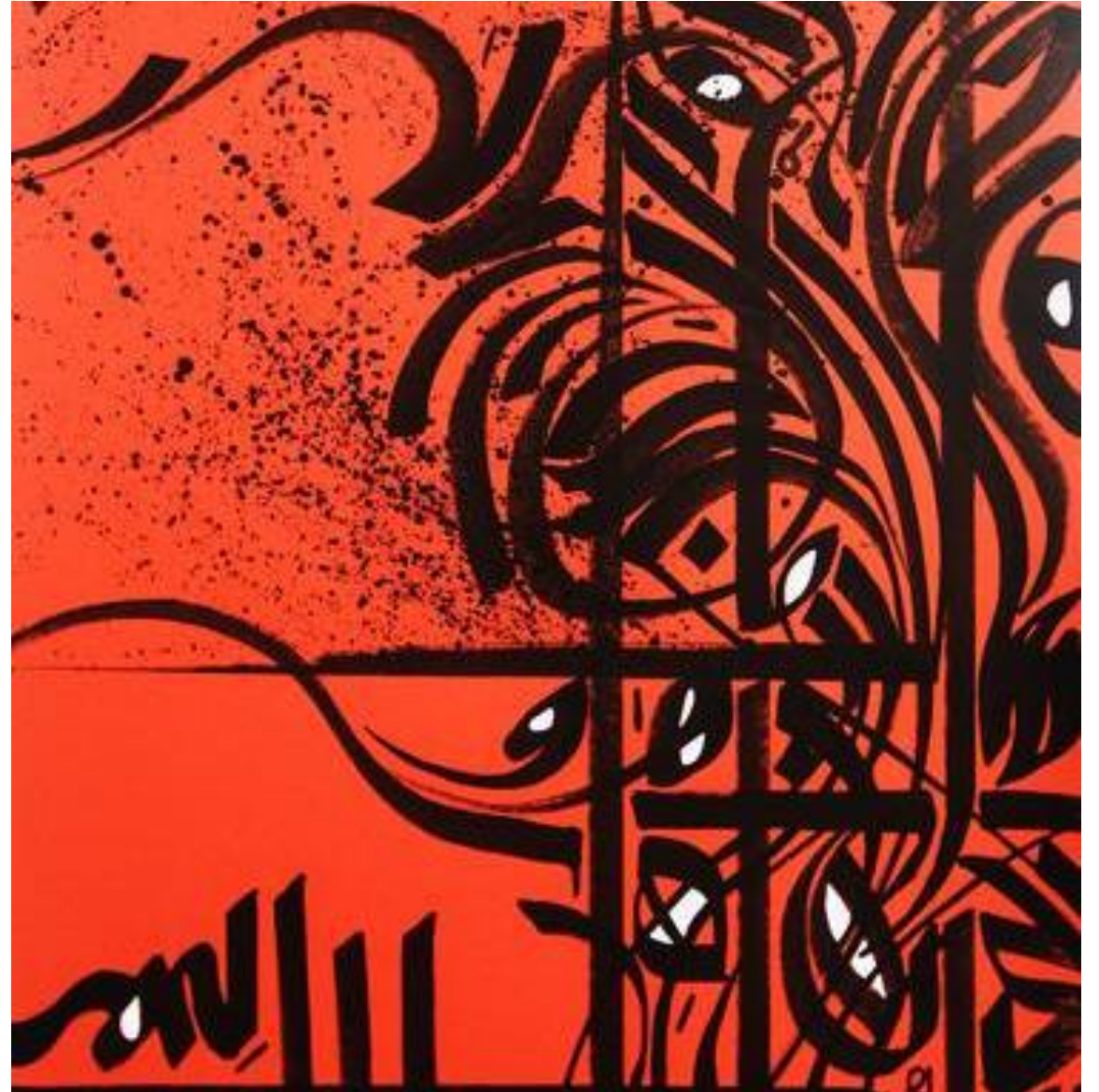
From the Exclusivist perspective, at least they are being honest and respectful of the religious other.



EXCLUSIVIST CRITIQUES OF INCLUSIVISM

A third critique is that the Inclusivist inclusion of other religious traditions under the Christian umbrella fails to recognise the fundamental religious difference between them

Islam, for example for example, denies the divinity of Christ and the need for the atonement. How can Muslims be depicted as “anonymous Christians” when their very beliefs are opposed to the foundational doctrines of Christianity?



EXCLUSIVIST CRITIQUES OF INCLUSIVISM

For example, within the Islamic tradition it would be said that only those who recognise that Muhammad is the final prophet of God and who endeavour to follow the teaching of the Qur'an and the Hadith will be able to enter paradise.

The soteriologies of other traditions are so different from the Christian one that it is inconceivable that salvation can be mediated through these traditions.



EXCLUSIVIST CRITIQUES OF INCLUSIVISM

A fourth critique is that the inclusivist position fails to provide a reason for mission – often an important aspect of Christian faith.

If believers believe that salvation is accessible to them outside of a particular religious tradition then they might be less inclined to preach that tradition to the non-believer, less inclined to engage with the religious other, and less inclined to identify with their own religious community.



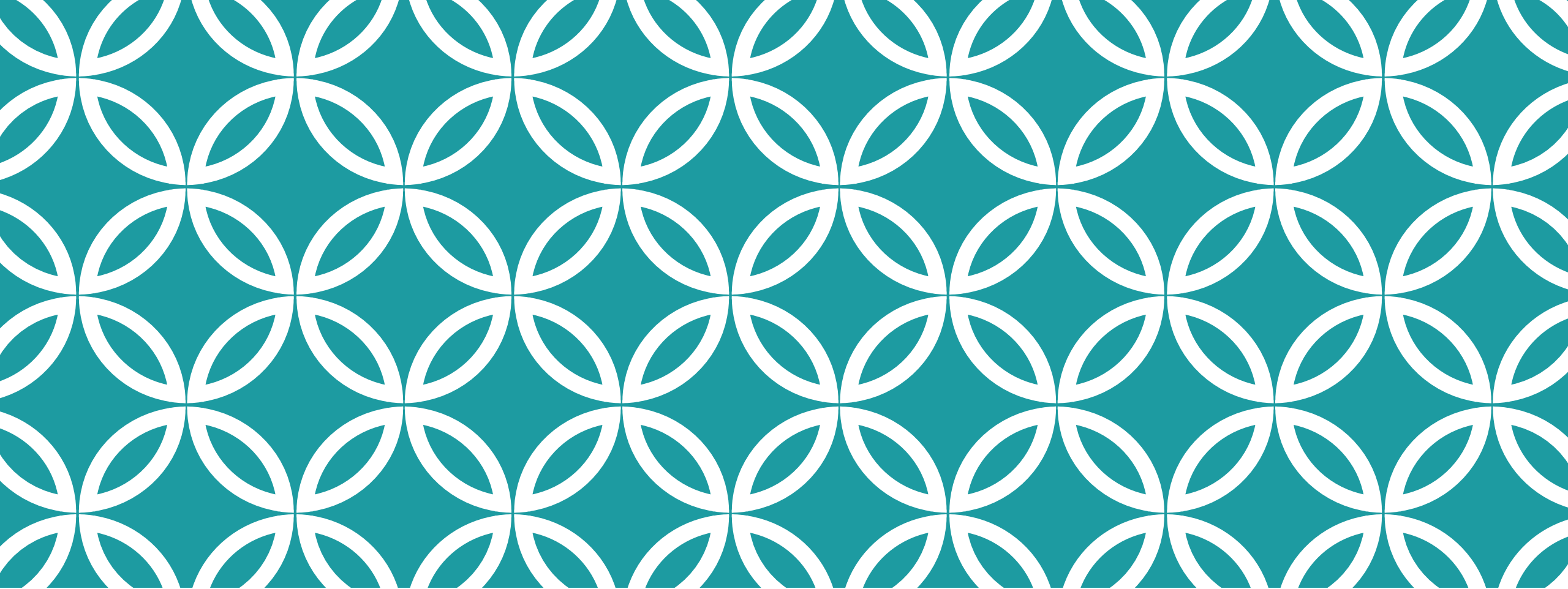


EXCLUSIVISM SUMMARY

Exclusivism is generally based on scriptural exegesis and arguments from tradition, with a strong emphasis on religious truth, particularity, and difference.

It generally critiques inclusivism (and pluralism) for misrepresentation, both of Christianity and of other religions.

Exclusivism gets a bad reputation, because people assume that exclusivism results in the marginalisation or denigration of the religious other, but it has nothing necessarily to do with how people of other faiths are treated in society.



HARD VS. SOFT EXCLUSIVISM

The boiled egg of the theology
of religion

HARD VS. SOFT EXCLUSIVISM

Sometimes a distinction is made by scholars between “hard” forms of exclusivism and “soft” forms of exclusivism.

“Hard” exclusivism is the classic formulation of to be saved you have to have heard and responded with faith and repentance to Christ's teaching.

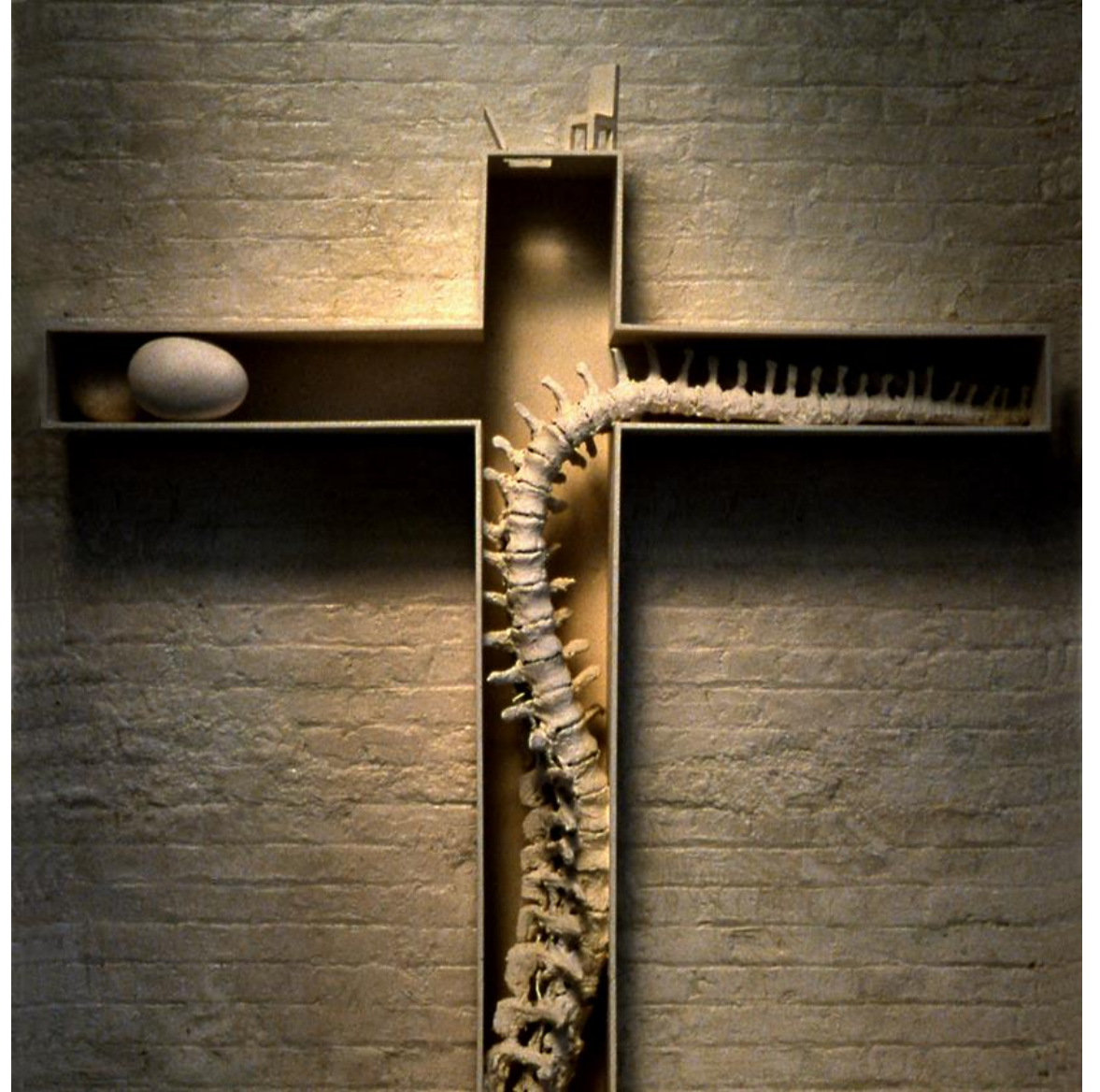
Soft exclusivism can drift quite close to a harder form of inclusivism, as it recognises aspect of ‘truth’ (not salvation!) in other religious traditions.

The main difference between soft exclusivism and hard inclusivism is the question of whether alternative religions can contain some good / revelatory truth or whether they do not.



HARD VS. SOFT EXCLUSIVISM

Hard Exclusivists would tend to say that alternative religions do NOT contain revelatory truth, and that the only point of possible salvation for non-Christians is through hearing and responding with faith and repentance to Christ's teaching in/after this life.



HARD VS. SOFT EXCLUSIVISM

Soft Inclusivists would tend to say that alternative religions DO contain revelatory truth, but that this has to be completed through hearing and responding with faith and repentance to Christ's teaching after this life.

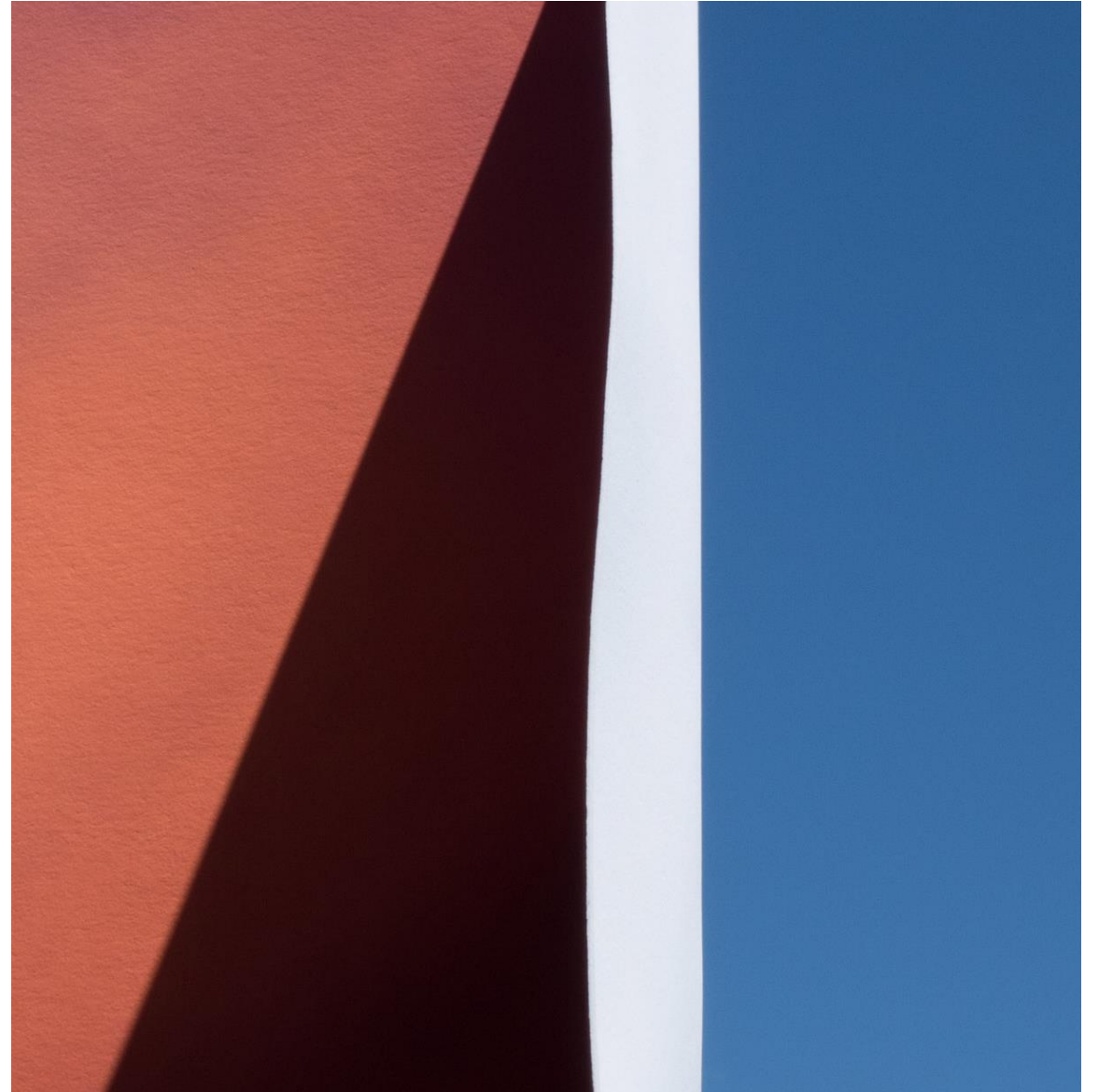


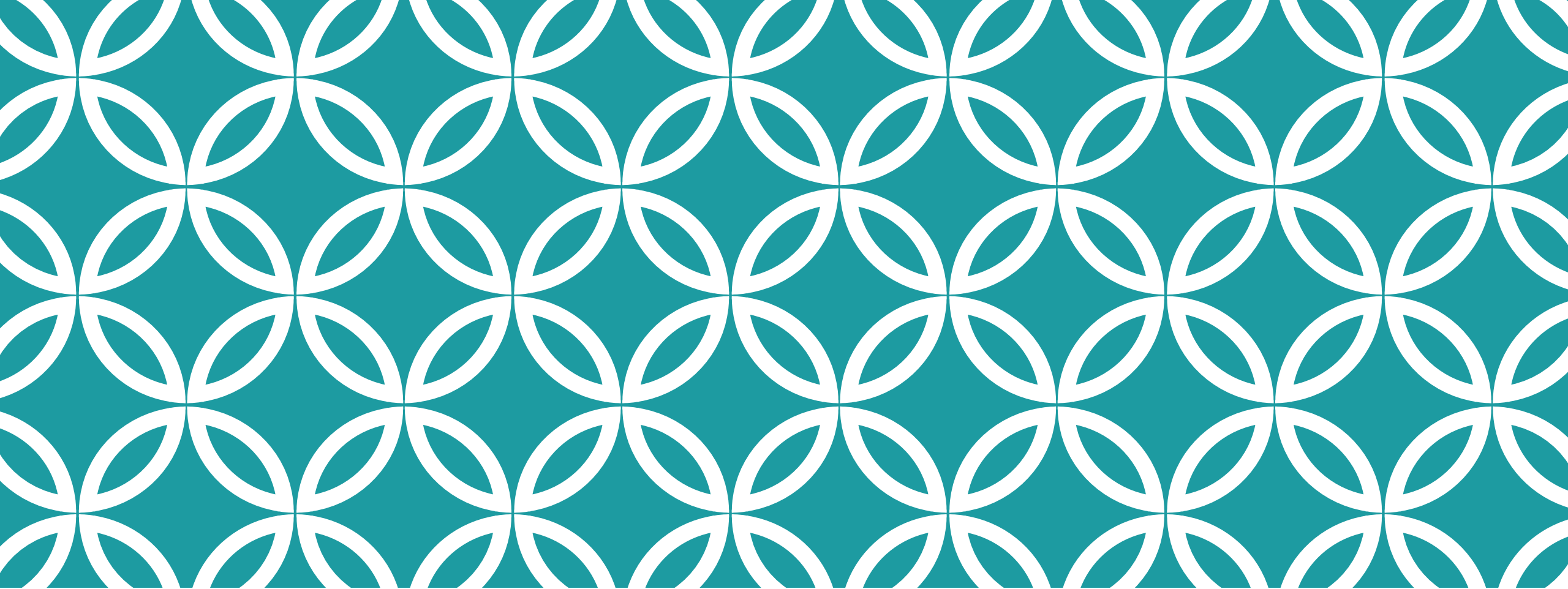
INTERIOR
DESIGN

HARD VS. SOFT EXCLUSIVISM

This distinction is important for the valuation of other religions within this world and also for the concomitant questions that flow from whichever position is adopted.

The very fact we sometimes struggle to make these distinctions highlights the breakdown of the typology – it fails to clearly or coherently deal with marginality between its tri-partite structure and fails to engage fully with non-Christian religious positions.





EXAMPLES OF EXCLUSIVISM

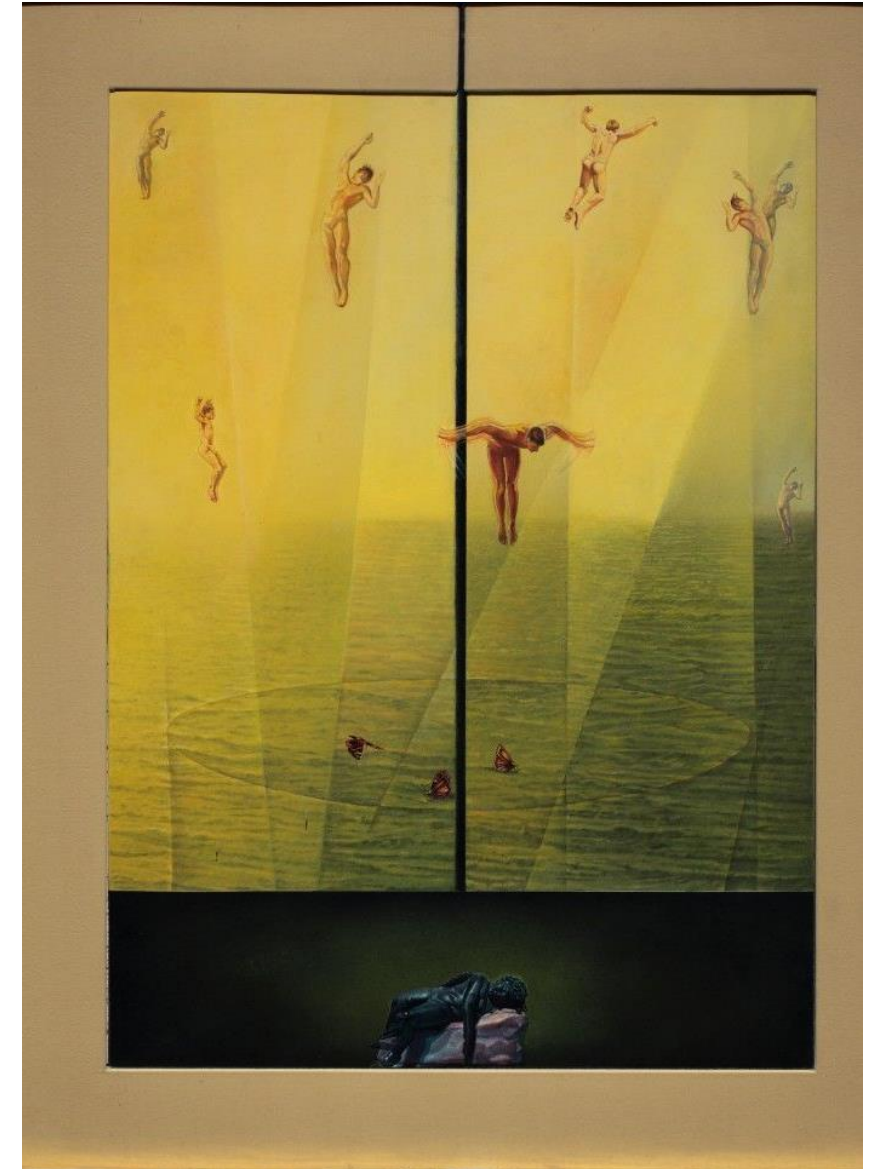


EXAMPLES OF EXCLUSIVISM

I want to take a moment to take a look at three specific forms of exclusivist thinking that have emerged within the Christian tradition at this point.

As I am sure you have noticed, Exclusivism leaves open a number of potential areas of difference - such as how exactly the Christian tradition is defined and on what basis – which means often exclusivists do not necessarily agree with each other on the method or reason of exclusion.

I have chosen three similar theologians to explore this with – all protestant and all from a particular time period where inclusivism was gaining currency.



KARL BARTH

Karl Barth is arguably the most important Protestant theologian of the twentieth century and his theology has generally been regarded as exclusivist in character.

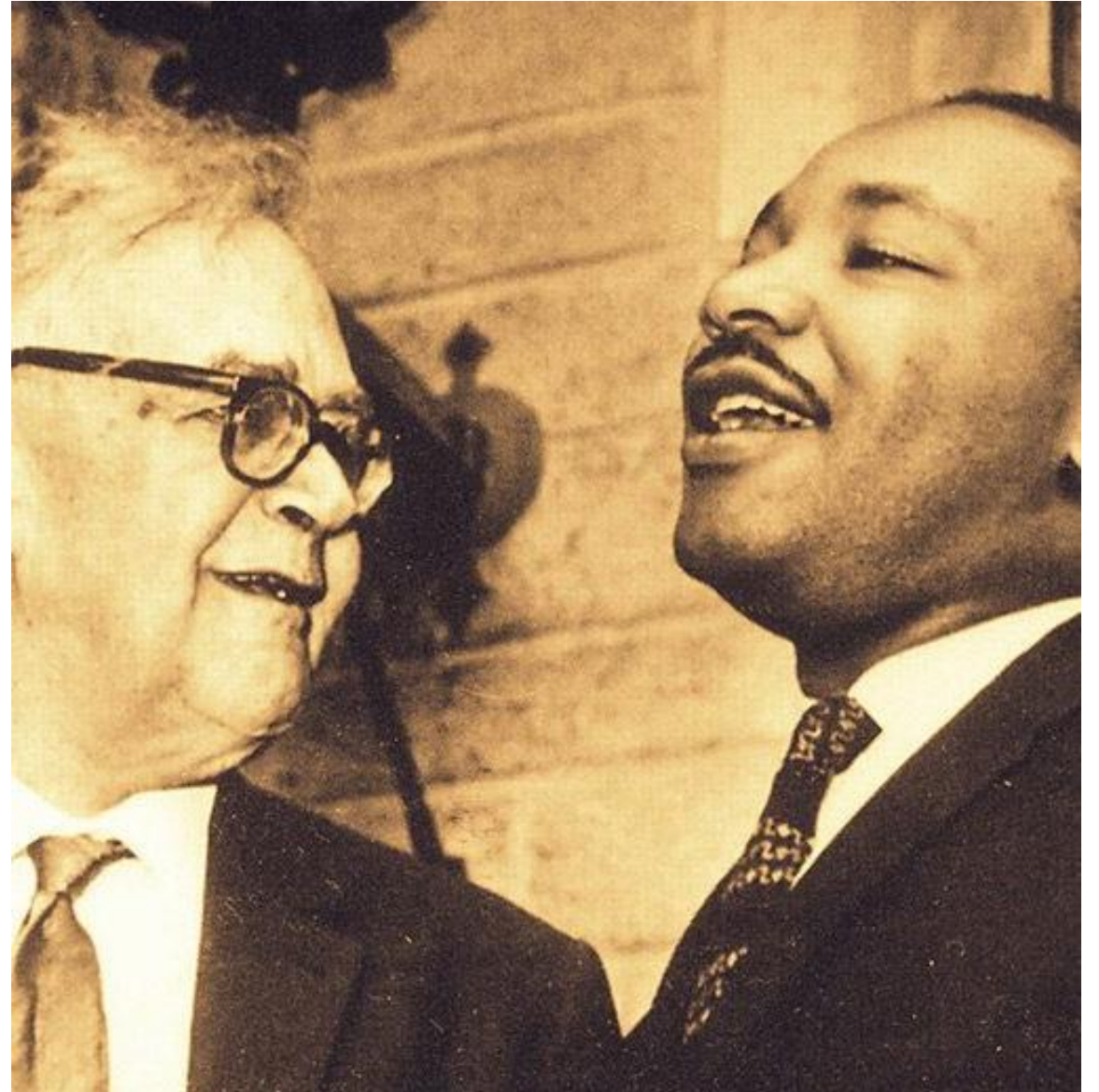
A critical aspect of Barth's theology is its Christo-centrism, that is the important and central place of the figure of Christ for making sense of the Christian tradition.



KARL BARTH

For Barth, Jesus is the self-revelation of God, and it is through Jesus, scripture and the message of the church that God is known. Jesus alone has overcome the condition of bifurcation between God and humanity and it is only through his example and sacrifice that salvation can be achieved.

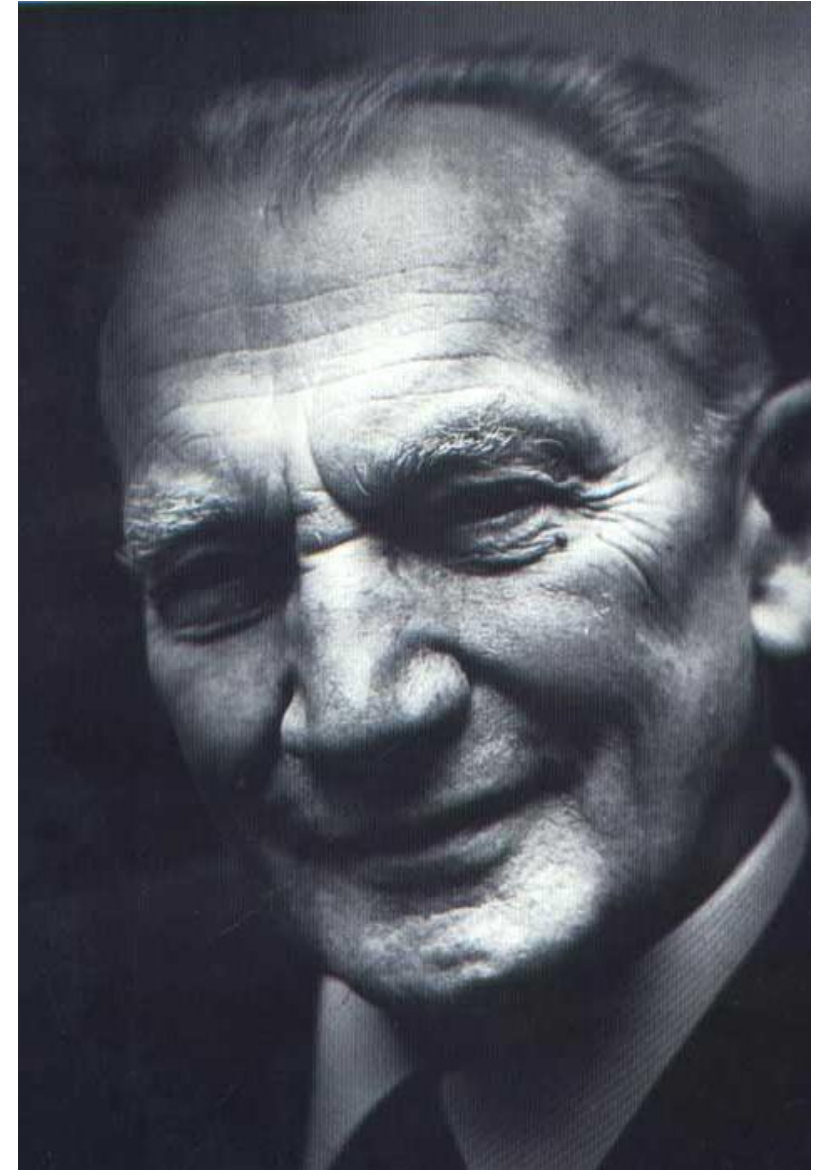
This focus on Christo-centrism means that the possibility of salvation through other religious traditions is excluded, as they lack the saving power and example of Christ.



HENDRIK KRAEMER

The theology of Barth and his interlocutor Emil Brunner had a major influence on the Dutch Protestant theologian, Hendrik Kraemer (1888-1965), who took up the discussion of non-Christian religious traditions more fully.

Kramer's ideas were presented in his book *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* which argued that there is a complete discontinuity between the form of revelation in the Christian tradition and those of other religious traditions.



HENDRIK KRAEMER

For Kraemer, the incarnation, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus were unique events which formed the core of the Christian account of salvation.

Due to their uniqueness, it is impossible to logically compare the Christian story with the stories of other religious traditions, as they fundamentally disagree.

It is for this reason that Kraemer rejects the inclusivist position – a foregrounding of the difference between religions and a preference for his own tradition.



PAUL ALTHAUS

The German Lutheran theologian, Paul Althaus (1888-1966) developed a slightly softer type of exclusivism.

Althaus was prepared to accept that God could be revealed in non-Christian religious traditions.

In other words, it is possible to have knowledge of God through other traditions and, therefore, a general knowledge of God.

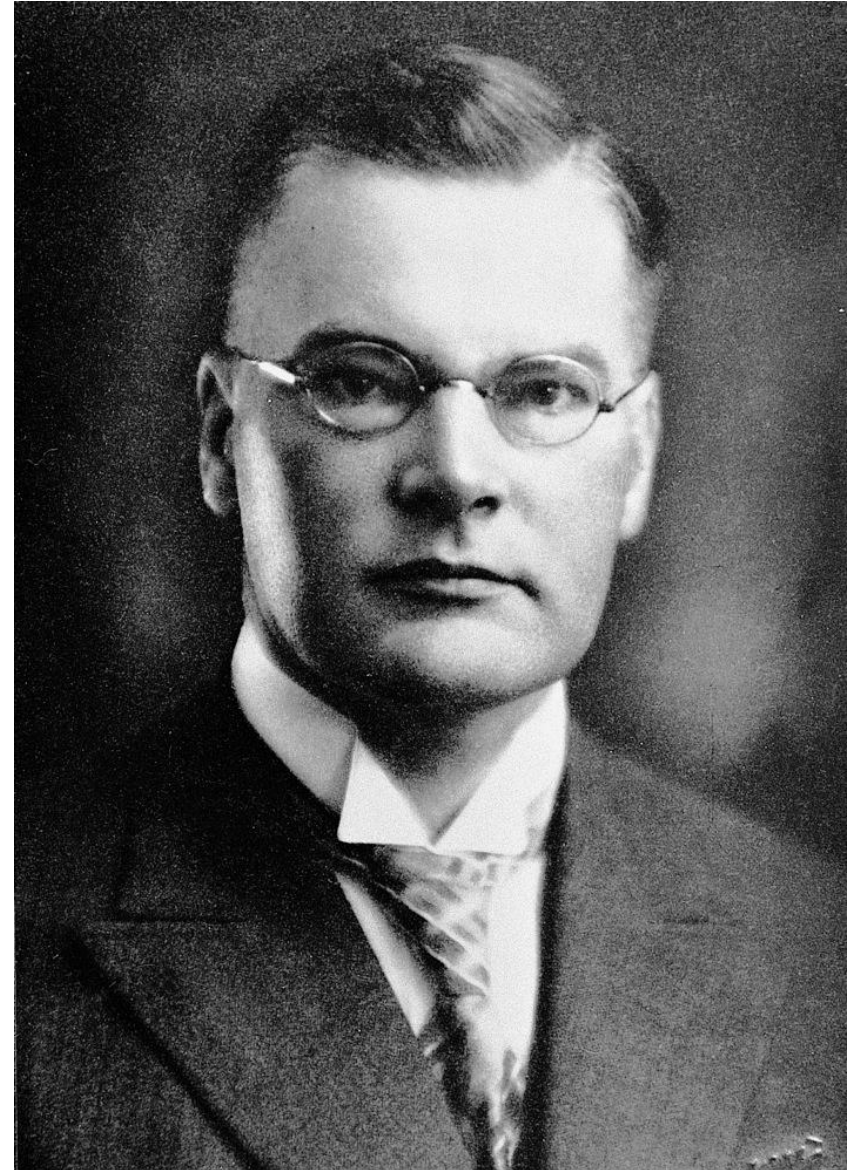


PAUL ALTHAUS

Althaus believed in an original revelation (that is, a general knowledge of God); and that the various religions were manifestations of that original revelation.

However, salvation is ultimately based on the transmission of the grace of Christ, which could only be found within the Christian tradition.

This is an example of 'soft' exclusivism – where salvation is retained within a single tradition, but some form of truth / revelation / value can be found in other traditions.



EXCLUSIVISM SUMMARY

Exclusivism is often seen as the most straight forward of the typological positions within the Christian theology of religions and also as the most 'pure'.

Both of these aspects have hopefully been shaken a little bit loose in the preceding slides, and you should now be able to see the internal differences within Exclusivism and the way in which it relates to the position of Inclusivism.

Remember, these positions are important for understanding **Christian responses** to other religions and to **questions of salvation** – even if the terms are often used in different contexts.



READINGS

Stetson B “The Meaning of Christian Exclusivism” in Stetson B, *Pluralism and Particularity in Religious Belief*, (Santa Barbara CA: Praegar International, 1994)

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