



The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching Beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God

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As Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the church door in Wittenberg, these are my Theses, nailed to the door of today's religious culture. Speak the name Carlton Pearson and you will get one of two reactions: heretic or prophet. Pearson was a Christian mega-star, host of his own TV show, traveling in private jets to speak at evangelical Christian gatherings. His church, Higher Dimensions, drew 5,000 people every Sunday. He was Oral Roberts' beloved protégé. Then, Pearson watched everything he had built crumble due to scandal. He didn't have an affair. He didn't embezzle church funds. He stopped believing in Hell. Following a revelation, he began to preach that a loving God would not condemn most of the human race to burn in the fires of Hell for eternity. Shocked, the Pentecostal community made him an outcast. This book is the story of one man's turning his back on fifty-plus years of religious teachings and on a family of millions to preach a new truth: The Gospel of Inclusion. In this book, Pearson shows that all of God's children are already saved by the sacrifice of Christ: gays, Muslims, Jews, atheists, everyone. Weaving theology, biblical scholarship and cultural history, Pearson asserts that the dogma of Hell is nothing more than a device to control the faithful, that authoritarian religion is at the heart of the world's troubles, that God is not a Christian, but indeed belongs to all humankind.

The Gospel of Inclusion: Reaching Beyond Religious Fundamentalism to the True Love of God Details

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Dan Gray says

This man truly lives this - at all costs (and they are huge). If this book doesn't knock your socks off, the story of how this book came to be should. It's a true rags to riches to rags story where the hero, one of the top Pentecostal preachers/scholars of his era and fresh with epiphany, thought he had what it took to revolutionize the Pentecostal tradition by challenging exclusivity. It cost him nearly everything as thousands of devoted followers abandoned him. He found refuge at All Souls Church in Tulsa where he honed his message with the help of a congregation of Unitarians willing to hear him out. My family and I were there for that and it was truly awesome. It revolutionized a tradition, but not the one he's intended. Rather, the Unitarians got a much needed dose of diversity, charisma, emotional vulnerability and kick-ass gospel music.

Mark says

I made it halfway through this book. I could mark it "abandoned," but I think I read enough for my conscience to call it read. Candy & I heard this guy interviewed on the radio years ago, and were interested in his book. Then it sat on our shelf for a long time. I finally picked it up, planning to read it all the way through.

It's from a guy that was STEEPED in fundamentalist, evangelical theology--even a church leader in that community--who started asking himself theological, moral, and philosophical questions. That's all good. Everyone should always be doing that, as far as I'm concerned. People will come to different conclusions, and I'm convinced that's ok (and unavoidable), too.

The thing is, the questions he's asking don't help me. I feel like I got to this stage when I was in junior high school, starting to think for myself. My own faith has developed, changed, and grown over the years, and I expect it will for my entire life. This is NOT the sort of stuff you ever "figure out" and are then done with. Always exploring, praying, trying to understand. And in that sense, Pearson's book doesn't help me on my journey. He's speaking to a different kind of person. It's a valuable thing for someone deeply within this community to speak to those peers in language that helps them with their exploration, though.

Joshua Grisetti says

I discovered this book a year or so ago and instantly fell in love with it. To me, the teachings of Christ were clearly Universal. The gift of salvation was revolutionary because it was a completely free gift for all of mankind. It was not a gift that was circumstantial -- being born in the right place at the right time, being exposed to the right religious doctrines, uttering the right set of words or names or creeds -- but truly free. A gift of grace, mercy and compassion so wildly unconditional that only a God could offer it. Unfortunately, such radical divine truth doesn't sell very well. And so, I believe, the early church leaders (including the Apostle Paul, who never actually met Jesus) reinterpreted Christ's message to become exclusive. "It's a 'free' gift as long as you follow this set of rules, these precise doctrines, say these exact words, sign on the dotted line..."

Bishop Pearson uses heart, mind and spirit to explain why this "exclusive" form of Christianity is a misinterpretation of scripture, and a logical minefield. God has no name (Ex. 3:14), and God is love (1 John 4:8). If we all agree to start with these fundamental truths, only one interpretation of Christ's teachings with any logical merit will emerge: the Gospel of Inclusion.

This is a must-read for any Biblical student (regardless of your age or your past).

Denise says

I would give this book more stars for its ideas than for the actual writing, which was pretty repetitive. But it's real food for thought. Many Christians will disagree with his simple premise, which is that Jesus's death reconciled all humankind to God. Not just those who invite Him into their lives, but everyone. So we're all "saved," and let's get on with the business of God's work on earth, and not argue about who's going to heaven. I like this guy.

Greg Dill says

Overall a good read. Rev. Pearson has definitely come from out of his Pentecostal roots and has embraced an inclusive gospel that embraces all people. The overall message of this book: all people are saved because of what Christ did on the cross. This book resonated with me as a former conservative evangelical with a very strict and restrictive theology. Pearson's Pentecostal background is very similar to my own background, though not as charismatic. Pretty much everything Pearson writes in this book, I agreed with. Though it does seem a bit repetitive at times. This book did remind me a bit of Rob Bell's "Love Wins" book. Ironically, both Pearson and Bell have been ostracized from the conservative theological community. And, something perhaps to be proud of, though sad. If you are looking for a gospel of love, a gospel that is already complete, and a gospel that embraces all people, then take a look at Pearson's "The Gospel of Inclusion".

Sarah Crawford says

This is the book by Bishop Carlton Pearson who was, originally, an evangelist type of preacher, going along with the hellfire-if-you're-not-perfect type of philosophy held by so many of the Christian right. Then he had a revelation and realized that, in his words, everyone had already been saved by Christ, and there was no hell and no need to always emphasize the worst in humans.

Rather, he believes in expanding Christian spirituality (not religion) to include everyone, including gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered people, and other people left aside by traditional Christianity.

He paid a severe price for that, though, as his fellow Christian rightists threw him "under the bus," so to speak. Still, he managed to recover through the help of some unexpected supporters, and he's now trying to preach this more people-friendly spirituality.

Much of what he says causes the Christian right to react extremely harshly.

"We do not need to be saved from God; we need to be saved from religion. We need to be saved from

perceptions of God that portray Him as an angry deity with a customized torture chamber called hell.”

“In an effort to placate this angry God, we have created doctrines, dogmas, and disciplines that have contributed to the global conflicts that prevent world peace.”

“The authoritarian dynamics of today's religious sects are an obscene parody of Jesus speaking to and leading his disciples.”

“...religion has become an armed front with two factions facing off: 'we,' the true believers, and 'they,' everyone else...This lends 'we' a sense of superiority, but also populates the world with enemies and casts believers as self-appointed soldiers in the army of the Lord. Under such influence, people will and do slander, attack, abuse, and kill in the name of whatever image of God their particular religion has.”

“The Pharisees were ethnic and religious separatists who, as a rule, did not congregate with anyone who was unlike themselves. IN many ways, modern Evangelical Christianity has become extremely Pharasic.”

“God is greater than any philosophical or religious concept or construct. Infinity cannot be constrained to religion.”

“The most ghastly irony in Christianity today is the preponderance of leaders who espouse hatred, prejudice, terrorism, arrogance, ignorance, and oppression while claiming all the while to be true followers of Jesus.”

“The devil is not an equal rival to God. The devil is something else entirely. The devil is legalism and stagnation; the concept that one must seek forgiveness from God through obedience and the practices of the various laws of religion. But if God, as Scripture declares, loves us with an everlasting love, then we don't need forgiveness, because God does not hold grudges and is larger than offense, anger, or hurt.”

“Religion constantly reminds us that we are not good enough.”

“The concept of an eternal hell requires that God not be benevolent and loving but eternally spiteful, sorrowful, and utterly bereft of mercy forever. He would have to be a monstrous, amoral God without conscience or compassion.”

“Faith is the anticipation of the existence of God and His blessing. Religion is the quest to systematize that feeling, to organize it under rules and laws.”

“What gives the merchants of hate more right to speak for God than anyone else?”

“Religion wants to control both the worshiped and the worshiper. IT seeks to manipulate the faith and the faithful in order to secure significance and control. Man knows that he cannot control God, but he can control religion, because he invented it, and he knows that by doing so he can influence the emotions and minds of those who either believe or dare not admit their disbelief.”

Nwhepcat says

I listened to this on audio from Audible -- an abridged version, which I don't normally go for, but after I heard him on "This American Life" I wanted more, and wanted it now. I grew up in an evangelical religion that is heavy on the hellfire, and after many years came to the conclusion I don't believe in hell. When you

have this kind of upbringing and come to that sort of conclusion, you feel like you're swinging out there in the breeze without much backup. Friends with that upbringing may still have the belief, and those who weren't brought up that way don't know why that's such a major thing to have hanging over your head (the fear that gets drilled into you lingers long after the intellectual belief goes away). That's why this is such an important book -- to hear from someone who's worked through these issues, and that it's someone who approaches this from a scholarly point of view. It's a courageous stand to take for anyone who's been raised in a fundamentalist church, and especially so for someone who has the weight of generations of Pentecostal pastors behind him, and the enormous congregation and reputation at stake for him.

Jay Medenwaldt says

I recommend not wasting your time on this book. I can think of a lot of people that might enjoy this book, but I can't think of anyone that would benefit from reading it.

I listened to it because the title made it seem like it could be helpful for me and Christianity For Everyone in learning how to make the Gospel message more inclusive. It was not helpful in this way because it simply espoused universalism (everyone goes to heaven, regardless of what they believe). I must admit, there was a time where I believed that might be true, at least in some cases; however, when I discovered John 8:24, that verse removed any ambiguity about the matter. This verse wasn't even addressed in the book.

The main problem with this book is that it is logically inconsistent and self-defeating. The author uses the Bible to support his beliefs, but then dismisses its authority and inerrancy. He explains away verses he doesn't agree with by taking them out of context or by simply saying the statement is absurd or not PC. If you're going to use the Bible as the basis for your belief, you cannot just pick and choose which parts of it to believe. You might as well just be honest and declare you are speaking about your preferences, not as an authority whom is knowledgeable about God. And that is precisely what this book is, one man's unfounded and illogical view of God.

Karen Potts says

Ideas new to me were presented in this book by the author who believes that if God is Love, that same god would not be ready to send people to everlasting hell if they failed to fulfill the requirements that many Christian churches insist on. The likelihood that hell does not exist as we suppose it to be was a welcome message but the book left me with many unanswered questions. In my opinion this is a book well worth reading & a message worth investigating.

JM says

Perhaps it's because I went to a seminary that focused on Biblical Criticism, much of what he wrote was not surprising. I was hoping the bulk of the book would be his story before and after the change in theological belief. Rather the text is primarily an explanation of what Inclusion Gospel is.

Tucker says

"Scripture never declares that Jesus is the personal lord and savior of anyone. It does declare that Jesus is lord and savior of the universe, the world, and the whole of humankind," says Carlton Pearson, a former bishop in the Pentecostal Church.

He changed his mind about God sending people to hell, causing him to lose his position in the church. He now believes there is a kind of salvation called "redemption" that is given to all humankind, whether they are Christians or not. Faith "simply acknowledges the reality of salvation" and "is the anticipation of the existence of God and his blessing." Another kind of salvation is sanctification, which is the attainment of a higher spiritual consciousness. Regardless of whether someone attains sanctification, he says, no one goes to hell.

If this is really the truth - that God has saved everyone universally and that there isn't any devil or hell - one wonders why God has revealed this truth to Pearson and not to everyone. Sometimes he quotes the Bible to support these metaphysical claims, yet, at the same time, he claims that the Bible merely records humans' understanding of God. This prompts the usual headscratching: if the Bible is composed by humans, isn't it, then, an unreliable source of metaphysical information?

Overall, it's an interesting personal account of how someone's theology and worldview can shift over time.

Meena says

As Pastor Pearson acknowledges himself, his belief in inclusion (Unitarianism) isn't new. But what I like about this book is the Biblical underpinnings - someone from an evangelical background who breaks down the original Greek of the Bible to support his position. That's new to me. I'm used to more conservative readings of the Bible; most liberal religious thinkers I'm familiar with don't go back to the text.

Some of the book is repetitive, but it's a message worth repeating - God is good and not cruel - He will save everyone eventually. IF I believe in good, that's the God I want to believe in.

I think everyone who claims to be religious should read at least a chapter of this book, if not the whole thing.

Carolyn Lind says

Bishop Carlton Pearson was a powerful, respected leader in the Charismatic/Pentecostal community, "a respected child of the Oral Roberts tradition." When he embraced the Gospel of Inclusion, his community rejected and persecuted him.

A few quotes to sample the flavor:

"I could no longer hide my personal theological crisis in the success of my ministry. I felt what I was hearing was important and from God; disruptive and insurrectionist, to be sure, but necessary, right and irresistible.

Sometimes, you have to create tension to get attention. And Lord Almighty, tension was flowing like lava from a volcano.”

“Propagating such anxiety, paranoia and terror is a powerful method of controlling the masses, which is why such fear is worldwide. If there is a devil, it is religion, not some fiend running around in red long johns carrying a pitchfork and sporting horns and a tail.”

“We still accept the parts of the Bible that we like—the ones that seem to forgive our failings, reinforce our bigotries or damn those whose views do not match our own. It is the ‘salad bar’ approach to belief.”

“The unconditional love of God is as spiritually ubiquitous and necessary as air.”

“If you believe something only out of fear, you will never know what it means to believe it out of love.”

“Most Christians are afraid to admit it, but we find it difficult to fully trust a God who is preached as the ultimate example of bipolar disorder—eternally loving yet sadistic and pitiless for anyone who falls short of his capricious standards. It seems much more plausible that He has done all things well, and that the final result will be triumphant victory, or as the fairy tales say, end ‘happily ever after.’”

The Gospel of Inclusion is an easy read; and speaks plainly to those in Pentecostal and Evangelical circles. This would be a great choice for group discussion!

Kenneth Taylor says

After watching “Come Sunday” on Netflix, the story about Bishop Carlton Pearson’s journey to the doctrine of Inclusionism, I decided to pick up this book to learn more about his stance. I very much enjoyed “Come Sunday”. Bishop Pearson’s story about what led him to believe that everyone has already received salvation and how that affected his evangelical ministry but it left me with numerous questions. How did he justify his beliefs? How would he respond to scriptures that seem to contradict this theology?

Pearson’s book “The Gospel of Inclusion” attempts to do this. Please note that I am reviewing this book as a non-religious person. While I do not believe this book is a tour de force as an argument supporting inclusionism I will say that I did enjoy the read. I am not sure how strong this book would be to convince someone to change their beliefs. However if you are looking for a basic understanding of the doctrine of Inclusionism or just a follow on from the movie then this would be the book to read.

Emmanuelle says

An important and surprising book!

Bishop Pearson was an evangelical pastor high in the Pentecostal Church hierarchy, when he realized that a God of love would not condemn His beloved children. But when he started to preach this message of love he was rebuked, ostracized and shunned on a national level. His congregants left by the thousands as and he soon lost his mega-church. He courageously stood by this gospel of love and has found new faith, followers

and family among people who were hungry for just such a message.

Bishop Pearson is right-on and writes from the heart-- to the heart-- sharing the heart of the true gospel message. A courageous, inspiring book from a modern apostle ...
