

Four

The Meaning of Christian Exclusivism

It is a truism among religious pluralists that "exclusivism" is an anachronistic as well as morally and philosophically flawed paradigm of religious belief.¹ Unfortunately, the attack on exclusivism seldom transcends name-calling and a host of hasty assumptions about the authenticity of all religions and the relationship of exclusivism to the ethics of those who espouse it. The regular mischaracterization of exclusivism as an orientation toward truth has led to a distorted understanding of what this perspective implies about religious belief and the religious believer—both exclusivist and nonexclusivist. In this final chapter I hope to at least partially clarify what exclusivism means and does not mean.

Although exclusivism is not unique to orthodox Christianity, the pluralist polemics against exclusivism almost uniformly imply that it is. Thus, in the following discussions I will presuppose that it is specifically Christian exclusivism under consideration. There are two brief but essential points to be made regarding exclusivism and its justification against pluralist criticism.

1. It is possible that exclusivism is "true."

The minimum ontological space needed for exclusivism, in any form, to be true is that metaphysical reality exist and be existentially logically consistent (e.g., God is not both wholly good and wholly evil simultaneously; Hell does not both exist and not exist).

The ontological consistency of the metaphysical world is not a controversial proposition, less so than its existence.² But it is an important point of which to be cognizant, since it indicates that only one set of religious propositions and images, purporting to explicate metaphysical reality as it truly is, can be, as a holistic set of religious understandings, "true."³ Here, I intend "true" to mean that these understandings are, as a whole and finite set of assertions and understandings, an accurate representation—as far as they go—of an objective metaphysical reality which is, in its complete essence and as an ontic whole, beyond finite human ken. So the "true" compend of religious assertions is always a subset, accurate but not necessarily exhaustive, of the set of assertions which—if makable and if made—would constitute all the true and proper statements about metaphysical reality.

Importantly, the fact that one and only one set of religious understandings is postulated as ultimately true in the above sense does not logically preclude the truthfulness, in this same sense, of portions of religious assertions from another source or tradition independent of the allegedly exclusively true way. Of course, as I think pluralists would rightly wish to point out, if such a holistic veridical uniqueness were granted to a religious system—presumably as a result of a cognitively coercive rational or experiential demonstration—this does not ipso facto mean that truth, religious and otherwise, has somehow taken up exclusive and singular residence in that one system. I agree. The presence of truth, of varying degrees and types, and in various religious contexts, is thoroughly compatible with the supposition that one system—through, perhaps, a peculiar divine revelation—constitutes an embodiment of truth that is at once overarching and in many ways shared by diverse traditions, yet nonetheless ultimately and decisively catalyzed and portrayed by a particular system. That is, only one way as a systematic whole remains entirely true (as far as it goes), but many elements of shared truth may be present and evident across different religious traditions. These points of intersection reflect ideas and/or understandings that entail no intellectual or spiritual incompatibilities.

Interestingly, this is exactly what Christian exclusivism—the usual target of pluralist critics—in most of its forms allows for. The *sensus divinitatis* believed to be inherent in human beings, by itself

and through reflection on the world and human realities, yields certain basic or general insights and understandings which are open to all human beings and require no special revelatory scripture or personal divine advent. The rich Christian traditions of the *sensus divinitatis* and general revelation allow for some interreligious commonality, both ethically and spiritually, between Christian exclusivism and other faiths. Most obviously, these might include respect for nature (creation); respect for all life, especially human beings; monotheism; and a sense of one's own imperfection. Closer reflection may yield more comprehensive overlaps, but the point is that pluralist critics seldom contemplate exactly what exclusivists mean by "true"—often assuming that they claim sole possession of all religious and even moral truth to the total exclusion of others. I do not believe this to be the case. This caricature of exclusivism quickly leads to the most common and emphatic criticism of exclusivism leveled by pluralists, one mentioned in earlier discussions: it is an immoral outlook toward truth, and causes morally wrong attitudes and behaviors.

2. *Exclusivism is not an immoral concept, and it does not cause morally wrong attitudes or behaviors.*

In the world of contemporary religious studies, exclusivism is commonly thought to be immoral and untenable. A recent statement from John Hick is representative of the denunciations of exclusivism and the manifold evils it is thought to generate:

[Exclusivism], with its baleful historical influence, in validating centuries of anti-semitism, the colonial exploitation by Christian Europe of what today we call the third world, and the subordination of women within a strongly patriarchal religious system, not only causes misgivings among many Christians but also alarms many of our non-Christian neighbours, creating invisible but powerful barriers within the human community.⁴

Pluralists think exclusivists arrogant and imperialistic because exclusivists believe their religious doctrines—as a holistic set of religious understandings—to be ultimately true, and others' ultimately untrue. Pluralists believe that the reality of religious diversity and the good will and religious accomplishment among persons of other faiths require consent to the equal truthfulness or salvific validity of all faiths. In a religiously plural world it is

morally wrong to veridically privilege one's own beliefs over other people's equally fervent and sincerely held beliefs.

A number of significant clarifications should be made regarding the moral implications of exclusivist truth claims. The first point to be made is that there is a clear difference between interacting with people and evaluating their truth claims. The thrust of the pluralist criticism of exclusivism is toward the untenable relativism which says "Whatever a person believes is true, is therefore true for them because they claim it is, and no one ought to deny this."

This implication further entails the implausible denial that *any religious claims can be evaluated intersubjectively*.⁵ It means, as well, that dissent from someone else's religious beliefs—in favor of the truthfulness of one's own—is intolerant and an instance of arrogance. In an earlier chapter I suggested that this assertion involves a misapprehension of the concept of tolerance. It also mistakenly posits a necessary connection between (1) believing Christianity true and other religions untrue and (2) mistreating and disrespecting non-Christians. It is simply not true, as pluralists imply, that disagreeing with someone (even in a religiously ambiguous world) about religious truth is tantamount to treating them badly. Interestingly, underlying this pluralist moral judgment is the logical mistake of assuming that the phenomenon of religious diversity in and of itself means that no one religious orientation is veridically superior. The fact of religious pluralism does not itself autonomously render exclusivist claims—of any sort—untrue or inaccurate. Similarly, an exclusivist claim about religious truth is not defeated strictly because such claims are believed to militate against human harmony and peace. The putative referent or referents of any set of truth claims exist or do not exist irrespective of the effects or consequences of advancing those particular truth claims. As I earlier remarked, I believe religious pluralists to be anthropologically naive in their contention that exclusivism itself is largely responsible for division in and between human societies, and that the pluralist paradigm would bring harmony. It is worthwhile to remember that—unfortunately and irrespective of their religious orientation—all persons are given to the personal failings pluralists ascribe to exclusivists. Pluralists err in laying at the feet of exclusivism responsibility for oppression, misogyny, racism, imperialism, and so on. Michael Peterson et al. very helpfully

summarize the hasty moral conclusions pluralists have drawn regarding exclusivism:

From this vantage point [pluralism], the blemishes of the exclusivistic religions—jihad, crusades, inquisitions and pogroms—are trotted out to demonstrate what happens when we attempt to evaluate critically other religions and their claims. We should not ignore the wrongs that believers have done in the name of their religion; they were and are deplorable, whether committed in Amritsar, Beirut, Belfast or Jerusalem. But we should not make the faulty inference that statements regarding how we should treat those with whom we disagree follow directly from epistemological claims about the truths or falsehoods they hold. That people hold a false belief does not allow us to mistreat them, nor should we give them special treatment if they make true claims.⁶

But there is a further problem with the charge of arrogance. Pluralists are faulting exclusivists for definitely and purposely believing the truth of something and denying the truthfulness of something else, knowing that others deeply believe this something else to be true. In effect, then, pluralists are censuring exclusivists for dissent.⁷ But dissenting is the very thing pluralists are doing when they criticize exclusivism: they contend that exclusivists are quite wrong—morally and as a matter of fact—in being exclusivist. This is no weaker or less dogmatic a position than that taken by exclusivists toward other faiths. On the pluralist conceptual schema, then, everyone, by disagreeing with other people and deliberately embracing incompatible beliefs, is guilty of personal moral impropriety.⁸

These charges of arrogance and moral turpitude are most certainly serious, but underlying them, I think, is a more basic criticism. Fundamentally, pluralist disapproval of exclusivism springs from the contention that an all-loving God absolutely could not permit what exclusivism implies: the damnation of some persons.⁹ Thus, it seems that the question of eternal retribution or punishment may serve as a window through which we can consider the systematic consistency of portions of pluralist philosophy, as well as the implications for exclusivism that damnation carries.¹⁰

Ronald Green, in his book *Religion and Moral Reason*,¹¹ has argued that *all* human religion evidences a threefold deep structure: first, a method of thinking that involves the "moral point of view";

second, some group of beliefs that speaks of the reality of moral retribution; third, a set of transmoral suppositions that enable persons to suspend moral judgment, to find "forgiveness." I would like to suggest that the second pillar of this deep structure of religion is indicative of a strong and innate awareness within human being of the imperative of punishment for wrongdoing, an imperative of which I do not believe pluralists are sufficiently cognizant.

Generally speaking, human beings manifest a sense of justice and fairness, a sense not wholly dependent on socialization and culture. While the acuity of this sense is more developed in some individuals than in others—and more respected by some societies than by others—everyone, especially children, seems to have a strong objection to inequity and unfairness.¹² It would seem reasonable to assert that morally mature people naturally feel a sense of outrage and moral anger at deeds of great evil. Genocide, gratuitous and systematic torture, deliberate and purposive betrayal of pure trust, and hypocrisy are all deeds that morally responsible persons find not simply immoral, but revolting. Our reactions to these heinous, intentional actions *reflect the presence* inside us of a strong sense of justice. We demand retribution for great wrongdoing, that is, the perpetrators of moral crimes *ought* to pay for having chosen so to act; they should be punished for what they have done. While there may be wide variation as to the specific prescription for retribution, there is present still the understanding that human dignity and simple justice require a penalty for egregious ethical transgressions. This is a point tellingly echoed by Peter Berger:

There are deeds that demand not only condemnation, but *damnation* in the full religious meaning of the word—that is, the doer not only puts himself outside the community of men; he also separates himself in a final way from a moral order that transcends the human community, and thus invokes a retribution that is more than human. . . . The massacre of the innocent . . . suggests the necessity of hell—not so much as a confirmation of God's justice, but rather as a vindication of our own.¹³

Berger is suggesting that some deeds, or strings of deeds, are so vile, so heinous and *essentially* evil as to merit and justly require nothing less than damnation to meet the demands of the human—

not to mention divine—sense of fairness. Holding persons genuinely and proportionally accountable for their free actions is a primary intuition of human moral awareness. It is also a principle which I believe to be in great tension with pluralist soteriology.

It is a reality that many theorists of religious pluralism are universalists. Most notable among them is Hick, who, although he has inculcated an ethical criterion (self-transcendence) into his evaluative rubric of religions—and, as I earlier said, denies that some religious paths are salvific (e.g., Jim Jones' cult)¹⁴—he is nonetheless a universalist, believing that "it can be predicted that sooner or later, in our own time and in our own way, we shall all freely come to God; and universal salvation can be affirmed, not as a logical necessity but as the contingent but predictable outcome of the process of the universe, interpreted theistically."¹⁵ But Hick's embrace of universalism is problematic. Note, as the above quote indicates, that his universalism requires of him a *particularizing* move: a theistic interpretation of final reality. The formal structure of Hick's religious pluralism, with its generic "Real" posited as the epistemically inaccessible noumenal backdrop to most human religious phenomena (all but those that do not mediate self-transcendence), would disallow such a statement. John Sanders has powerfully criticized the universalism of Hick and fellow pluralist Paul Knitter:

If the words "God will save" are to have any meaning, they must have a particular content. When Hick and Knitter claim that *God* will save *all*, do they have a Christian understanding of God and salvation in mind? If so, then they are not true pluralists: they are smuggling in a Christian conception and making it definitive. If not, then what exactly do they mean? If they are genuinely including Hinduism or Buddhism, then they are radically altering the Christian understanding of the assertion that "God will save," since these non-theistic Eastern religions posit a non-personal God who cannot *do* anything and a nonindividualistic existence after death that is quite different from the Christian conception. . . . Pluralists such as Hick remove the God of Christianity via the front door with much fanfare only to smuggle him quietly in the back door, and it is for this reason that they are not successful in completing the revolution from a christo-centric to a theocentric theology.¹⁶

Furthermore, there is an obvious internal rivalry between Hick's universalistic faith and the linchpin of his soteriology, namely,

self-transcendence. If, finally, both those who strove for and achieved self-transcendence and those who remained ego-centered are "saved," the significance of self-transcendence is seriously undercut. If the eternal end of both those who achieve self-transcendence and those who fail to achieve it is identical, the gravity of self-transcendence as the salvific indicator is negligible—at best. It is strange that Hick is willing to posit a moral standard in soteriology, given his strong personal belief in the love of God and its eventual conquest of all human moral failure. Inevitably, this ethical criterion, the very moral core of his pluralism, is swallowed up by his universalism. In the face of a universalist eschatology, wherein damnation is not even a possibility, any moral standard for "salvation" can only be of nominal—and strictly immanent—significance.

This brings us to the conflict between what I am claiming is human being's moral demand for retribution in cases of gross moral outrage and universalism's inevitable erasure of even the most egregious, heinous crimes. Note that for the Hickian pluralist this problem is not solved by an appeal to salvation by "grace" or "atonement," since these ideas unavoidably introduce a divine personality or religious particularity which is, putatively anyway, intolerable on this paradigm. While certainly it is true that, for example, the orthodox Christian understanding of salvation by grace through faith alone sees salvation from sin—purchased by Christ's atoning sacrifice—as independent of one's own moral worth and therefore a possibility even for those guilty of extraordinary transgression, *pluralists reject this entire framework as immorally exclusivistic*, since it conceptually confers salvation only on those whose trust is in Christ. Thus, it is appropriate to challenge the unsystematic pluralist universalism on the insignificance of the relationship between morality and salvation that inheres in it, and the affront this constitutes to the human moral sense.¹⁷

Is it not plain that there are those who, by finally and completely rejecting the Good, have ceased to be persons capable of desiring or enjoying the eternal Blessedness universalism entails? By dint of a lifetime of moral evil and deliberate, intentional, practiced, and complete rejection of Goodness, they have freely forged a character, a *human self*, utterly incompatible with the Divine, and existence in a "heaven." As C. S. Lewis has eloquently written in his allegory

The Great Divorce, they would not wish to dwell in the heavenly city, and they would not feel comfortable or "at home" if they were there.¹⁸ Indeed, as Lewis wrote elsewhere, "the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*."¹⁹ For individuals who freely lived a life of rejection of the Good to change, pre- or postmortem, they would quite literally have to become *different* persons. But Hick's system does not explicitly assert this necessity. Their personal substance—composed in significant degree of the deplorable personal properties and characteristics volitionally formed on this earth over a lifetime—would need to be changed if they were to become the type of persons who *willed*, *could enjoy*, and *could function* in a state of eternal Blessedness, a condition governed by values and ends radically different from those they autonomously lived by on earth. This would mean that the undesirable properties they volitionally cultivated in their life on earth would have to somehow be replaced with the virtues proper to "heavenly" residence.²⁰ But entirely apart from the intellectually troubling possibility that this process would constitute the divine usurpation of human free will and autonomy, it would basically mean that this life on earth—how one lived and what one chose to do and believe—was in the final analysis irrelevant, since it apparently will have made no lasting impact on one's self-formation or destiny.

This moral-soteriological incongruity is in large part a product of Hick and other pluralists' rejection of the morality of Hell. Indeed, it is the immorality of Hell that is to them the major bane of exclusivism. But I would like to suggest that an emotional focus on the horror and awfulness of Hell obscures what it is about damnation that genuinely bothers some thinkers, and what is truly bothering to pluralists, especially Hick and Smith: it is that they do not believe that anyone actually deserves to be damned. They see such a terrible judgment as unjustified and unfair. Thus, it seems to me that the first and most important question to be considered when we contemplate the damnation of some people is "Do they truly deserve it?" Have the conditions of desert for this particular state actually been met? If in fact damnation is not undeserved, and the state of this damnation not undeserved, then we must agree that it is fair and morally unproblematic. This is the essential question to be addressed by pluralists, exclusivists, or anyone else concerned about the possibility of damnation. Certainly within the

Christian exclusivism faulted by pluralists for being unfair and insensitive in this regard, the theoretical and conceptual resources exist and have been internally employed to argue, in various styles, that all human beings are lost and merit destruction. It is not remarkable that some human beings are eternally lost; it is remarkable that some are not. Of course pluralists directly reject this claim about human and spiritual reality, believing it grossly unfair. Thus, the pluralist-exclusivist contest over the morality of Hell is a direct conflict of religious belief, with each side making different and contradictory claims, in the same way religious believers everywhere do. It seems, then, that the faulting of exclusivism by pluralism for its doctrine of Hell is not representative of any great moral power on the part of pluralism (since the question is whether or not damnation is deserved), but only a doctrinal opposition, akin to Muslims believing that Jews and others are erring in not believing Muhammad to be the prophet, or the Koran inspired.

Similarly, the fundamental criticism of exclusivism as immoral because it isn't universalistic, captured in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's aphorism, "It will not do to have a faith that can be undermined by God's saving one's neighbor,"²¹ is actually doctrinal disagreement, not an instance of exclusivists wishing for the harm or damnation of their neighbors, or pluralists demonstrating unusual ethical sensitivity. It is a mistake (and intolerant) to transcribe purely doctrinal disagreement—even intrafaith doctrinal disagreement—into a matter of moral dereliction or insensitivity on the part of those with whom one disagrees.

Indeed, I find Christian exclusivism's attitude toward other faiths and their adherents to be humane and liberal.²² Obviously this is a contention that most pluralists reject out of hand. For them any exclusivism is by definition exclusionary, and—imbued with the popular spirit of egalitarianism—they find such a position morally wrong. But once again I think they have leapt to hasty conclusions about the meaning of exclusivism. I am not convinced that religious exclusivism must necessarily be immoral, and Christian exclusivism in particular is conceptually ordered so as not to issue in the mistreatment of others. For the Christian exclusivist, one's salvation is completely independent of—and in spite of—one's works or merit, and so any personal pride or personal sense of accomplishment in one's assumed salvation is wholly out of

place.²³ Likewise, anything but good will, humanistic concern, and the most fervent hopefulness for the salvation of those presently not trusting in Christ is inconsistent with what ought to be the attitude of those who have been freely forgiven of their sins.²⁴ *Contra* pluralist assumptions, Christian exclusivism derives its soteriological exclusiveness not from hauteur, ill-will, or resentfulness, but from faith in and conviction about the radically unique *incarnation and resurrection of Christ*, which, in the eyes of the believer, marks Jesus Christ as the distinctive divine response to the human condition; the exclusive answer to an enduring longing well expressed by Philo (David Hume):

The most natural sentiment which a well-disposed mind will feel on this occasion, is a longing desire and expectation, that heaven would be pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate, this profound ignorance, by affording some more particular revelation to mankind, and making discoveries of the nature, attributes, and operations of the divine object of our faith.²⁵

NOTES

1. Here I follow current practice in my use of the appellation "exclusivism," even though it has an obvious pejorative flavor. As I earlier remarked, I prefer the designation "particularism," which better captures the attitude of this perspective toward religious truth, and which is free of the polemical baggage inherent in "exclusivism."

2. Hick believes in the ontological consistency of ultimate reality, even though, as I pointed out in Chapter 1, note 20, under the regime of transcendental agnosticism he should not be able to acknowledge the ontological consistency of ultimate reality.

3. Of course I am assuming that it is possible for a religious system to be true—to correspond to objective reality—an assumption often rejected in favor of Rudolf Bultmann's famous—and opposite—assumption that in the age of the electric light, it is simply not possible to believe in the New Testament world of spirits. But any categorical and absolute renunciation of the *possibility* of religions making objective truth claims about the Divine should be avoided, since it would constitute an instance of the very activity it is asserting to be impossible. We must, logically, hold open the possibility of religions making objective truth claims, because to rule out that possibility is actually to make an objective religious truth claim about the Divine, its range of actions, potentials, and inclinations. "It is objectively true that no system is able to make objective

truth claims" is not a statement that can abide its own logic. The finitude of the human person, the infinity of the Divine, and our own location in space and time all preclude us from rendering an absolute and unequivocal "No" to the possibility of religion speaking in an objective voice.

4. John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), p. viii. Similarly, Wilfred Cantwell Smith has written, "Exclusivism strikes more and more people as immoral" ("An Attempt at Summation," in Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky, eds., *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981], p. 202); and Joseph Runzo concurs: "[Exclusivism] is neither tolerable nor any longer intellectually honest in the context of our contemporary knowledge of others faiths." See Joseph Runzo, "God, Commitment and Other Faiths: Pluralism vs. Relativism," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 357.

5. I take it to be patently false that religious arbitration is an absolute impossibility. Three points show this to be the case: Hick himself distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic religious practices in his theory of religious pluralism; pluralists believe exclusivism to be morally wrong and untrue; the Hindu practice of suttee is *prima facie* morally wrong. See Chapter 3, note 43, in this work.

6. Michael Peterson, William Hasker, Bruce Reichenbach, and David Basinger, *Reason and Religious Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 221.

7. The illiberalism of this is of course ironic, given the liberally minded and tolerant image of themselves pluralists evince.

8. For a detailed examination of the self-refuting quality of the pluralist disapproval of exclusivism as "arrogant" or "egotistical," see Alvin Plantinga's essay, "A Defense of Religious Exclusivism," in Louis Pojman, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, 2d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1994), pp. 529–544, especially pp. 531–535.

9. Of course the contention that God is loving or that the Ultimate is supremely benevolent—a notable assumption of Hick (see his *Evil and the God of Love* [New York: Harper and Row, 1966], pp. 98, 113–120, 183, 377–381)—is clearly problematic in light of his present transcendental agnosticism. As Clark Pinnock argues, "The Christian pluralists cannot have it both ways. If the God of love is the basis of their pluralism, then God must in reality be personal and not impersonal. A choice has to be made. A truth question is involved. Either there is a God or there is not. Either God is personal or he is not. Either God is loving or he is not. Either the Koran is the Word of God or it is not. There is no way to get around the truth of such propositions, that is, if religion is more than a subjective attitude." Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), p. 134.

10. The scholarly literature on universalism, damnation, the morality of Hell, and the ethics of divine judgment is vast, and quickly accumulating. My speculative discussion of damnation will of necessity be very narrow, but the following books and articles are some of the seminal sources for the ongoing consideration of these issues, and they themselves are replete with further bibliographical references. Centrally important books include Ernest Cassara, ed., *Universalism in America: A Documentary History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971); William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987); William Crockett, ed., *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992); Stephen T. Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1981); Gary Habermas and J. P. Moreland, *Immortality: The Other Side of Death* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1992), especially pp. 156–181; Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, especially pp. 149–180; and idem, ed., *The Grace of God, the Will of Man* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1989); John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1992); Richard Swinburne, *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), especially pp. 179–208; Peter Toon, *Heaven and Hell: A Biblical and Theological Overview* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1986); Jerry L. Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). Critical recent articles include Marilyn McCord Adams, "Hell and the God of Justice," *Religious Studies* 11 (1975): 443–447; Robert M. Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (April 1977): 109–117; David Basinger, "Divine Control and Human Freedom: Is Middle Knowledge the Answer?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 1 (March 1993): 55–64; Rod Bertolet, "Hasker on Middle Knowledge," *Faith and Philosophy* 10, no. 1 (January 1993): 3–17; David Brown, "No Heaven Without Purgatory," *Religious Studies* 21 (1985): 447–456; Robert F. Brown, "God's Ability to Will Moral Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (January 1991): 3–20; William Lane Craig, "Talbot's Universalism," *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 297–308; idem, "'No Other Name': A Middle Knowledge Perspective on the Exclusivity of Salvation Through Christ," *Faith and Philosophy* 6, no. 2 (April 1989): 172–188; William Hasker, "Providence and Evil: Three Theories," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 91–105; idem, "Middle Knowledge and the Damnation of the Heathen: A Response to William Craig," *Faith and Philosophy* 8, no. 3 (July 1991): 380–389; S. Mark Heim, "The Pluralistic Hypothesis, Realism, and Post-eschatology," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 207–219; Paul Helm, "Universalism and the Threat of Hell," *Trinity Journal* 4 (Spring 1983): 35–43; David P. Hunt, "Middle Knowledge and the Soteriological Problem of Evil," *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 3–26, with a useful bibliography of

relevant literature on p. 3; Paul T. Jensen, "Intolerable but Moral? Thinking about Hell," *Faith and Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (April 1993): 235–241; Mark Stephen Pestana, "Radical Freedom, Radical Evil and the Possibility of Eternal Damnation," *Faith and Philosophy* 9, no. 4 (October 1992): 500–507; Richard Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell," in Alfred J. Freddoso, ed., *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Thomas Talbott, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," *Faith and Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (January 1990): 19–42; idem, "Providence, Freedom and Human Destiny," *Religious Studies* 26 (1990): 227–245; idem, "Craig on the Possibility of Eternal Damnation," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 495–510; Kerry S. Walters, "Hell, This Isn't Necessary after All," *Philosophy of Religion* 29 (1991): 175–186; David Widerker, "A Problem for the Eternity Solution," *Philosophy of Religion* 29 (1991): 87–95; Keith Yandell, "The Doctrine of Hell and Moral Philosophy," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 75–90.

11. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

12. This point is, especially with respect to children's moral sense, argued cleverly by C. S. Lewis in his *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), pp. 17–43.

13. Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1969), pp. 67–69.

14. See John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 217.

15. John Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," in Stephen T. Davis, ed., *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), p. 52. Of course a point often overlooked by Christian pluralists like Hick and Smith, who are wont to retain a fragmented affirmation of "God as Love" from the orthodox tradition they mostly disparage, is that on this view God's attributes operate in a coherent and unified way. God's love, justice, mercy, righteousness, etc., function together to serve divine purposes; no one of them is principal to the others. Thus, any consideration of the judgment of human beings meted out by God's love must also consider the work of divine justice, righteousness, etc. For a comprehensive critique of John Hick's theodicy, including Hick's response in an afterword written by him, see R. Douglas Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick's Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

16. Sanders, *No Other Name*, pp. 120–121. See Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, pp. 70–81, for other criticisms of Hick's universalism, which, in Walls' words, "is fraught with inconsistency and confusion" (p. 79). See also the trenchant criticisms in Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God*, pp. 215–227; and Helm, "Universalism and the Threat of Hell."

17. Note that the traditional Christian schema of salvation by grace through faith alone does not engender similar offense, since on this particular account the claims of justice—in both the divine and the human sense—are not overrun or subsumed by grace, but rather met and satisfied by the propitiatory atonement of Jesus Christ, graciously given by God.

18. C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan, 1946). Regarding what the actual state of the lost might be, from a Christian context, there is no univocal answer. For a sensitive recounting of the major possibilities, see Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of Final Punishment* (Houston: Providential Press, 1983); Richard Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (London: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 166–172; idem, *Responsibility and Atonement*, pp. 180–184; Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 262–277; and Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (London, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 123–151. Interestingly, Jerry Walls has suggested that it is the consistency of a given person's evil, not simply its magnitude, that leads that individual into a damned state where "the possibility of repentance is all but foreclosed." See Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation*, pp. 113–138, especially pp. 123–124. For an excellent brief survey of universalistic thinking, and a critique of Hick and Paul Knitter's universalism in particular, see Sanders, *No Other Name*, pp. 81–128.

19. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 127. Emphasis in original.

20. While, as I said, Hick's pluralism does not explicitly entail a purgatorial remedy to the unfitness of some for Blessedness, such a recourse would appear to be an ad hoc move on his part, and indicative of the moral quandary faced by a truly pluralist universalism.

21. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (New York: American Library, 1963), p. 132.

22. Examples of this open-mindedness to other religions' insights are to be found in Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), chap. 7; Russel Aldwinkle, *Jesus—A Savior or the Savior?* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1982); S. Mark Heim, *Is Christ the Only Way?* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1985). Sociologist Robert Wuthnow has suggested that many orthodox Christians—traditionally understood as exclusivistic—have begun to evidence views of other religious systems far less dismissive of their worth and relevance to Christian faith than is generally thought by exclusivism's critics. See Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals and Secularism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 174–175.

23. For simplicity's sake I am here bracketing any consideration of pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic understandings of personal cooperation with divine Grace, which might by some be construed as the individual contributing to his or her own salvation, and therefore, conceivably but I think misguidedly, a cause for pride. Postconciliar understandings of the individual's role in his or her own salvation are not relevant here, since the Catholic position from that time on is understood to be inclusivist, not exclusivist. For an authoritative pre-Vatican II statement of official Church teaching on this matter, see Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Patrick Lynch (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1974).

24. See Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12–14.

25. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Nelson Pike (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), part 12, para. 33.