The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity

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1

Modernity's Hidden God within Christian and Jewish Pluralism

WHOSE "GOD," WHICH TRADITION?

In this chapter I want to analyze two influential "pluralist" Christian theologians who suggest overlapping strategies for engaging with other religions. I look at two Christians rather than one for three reasons. First, I am particularly interested in Christian theology on this matter, as I am a Christian theologian. Second, both John Hick and Paul Knitter are increasingly influential, so much so that a senior Roman Catholic cardinal has spoken out against both within one lecture—and given that Hick is a Presbyterian, this is quite an honor! Knitter is Roman Catholic. Third, I think they represent two very different forms of pluralism: Hick's orientation is basically philosophical; and Knitter's is theological, with a special emphasis on ethics. In this sense I want to show that despite important differences of approach and orientation, they can both be analyzed in terms of the Enlightenment tradition.

By "pluralist" I mean a range of features, shared by writers who use this term of self-description, to indicate the broad assumption that: all religions (with qualifications) lead to the same divine reality; there is no privileged self-manifestation of the divine; and finally, religious harmony will follow if tradition-specific (exclusivist) approaches which allegedly claim monopoly over the truth are abandoned in favor of pluralist approaches which recognize that all religions display the truth in differing ways. One of my arguments will be that no non-tradition-specific approach can exist, and such an apparently neutral disembodied location is in fact the tradition-specific starting point of liberal modernity, what MacIntyre calls the Encyclopedic tradition.

If my argument is persuasive then a number of consequences should

follow in relation to such pluralist claims. First, one should find that they do not work. Logically, pluralists simply present themselves as honest brokers to disputing parties, while concealing the fact that they represent yet another party which invites the disputants actually to leave their parties and join the pluralist one: then, of course, interreligious harmony will be attained. Ironically, there would be no religions left when such harmony was attained, for the disputants are invited to leave their traditions (which constituted the original points of disagreement), so as to join a common and new one: liberal modernity. Second, if they do not work, then we shall find that our Christian pluralists (and later, a Jewish pluralist) in fact espouse one of the "gods" of modernity: unitarian, deistic or agnostic. The trinitarian God can find no place within such "Christian" approaches, except as the alleged cause of obstructing good interreligious relations. Third, if the two above suppositions are true, we will be able to claim properly that "pluralists" are really "exclusivists," the category type which they constantly criticize. Related to this polarity of pluralism and exclusivism, we also find the middle-ground term, inclusivism. I shall suggest that the term inclusivism is unhelpful. Before testing my arguments against two Christian theologians (John Hick and Paul Knitter), and then in regard to one Jewish theologian (Dan Cohn-Sherbok), I need to attend briefly to the genesis of this influential typology which I once defended and now wish to deconstruct.

In 1983 Alan Race put the typology of pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism firmly on the map in his influential book, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*.[1] Race acknowledged his debt regarding the threefold typology to the European nineteenth-century Christian missionary, John Farquhar. In 1986, I, among many other writers, followed suit in adopting and developing this threefold typology which is now found in many works dealing with Christian attitudes to other religions. The types have also been used as logical categories to analyze other religions' attitudes to each other, for example, Hindu attitudes to other religions, or Jewish attitudes to religious diversity.[2] Hence, my concern is in part with the logical form of the typology in so much as it serves to mask the "god" behind "pluralism." The process of unmasking will allow the debate to move out beyond the typologies into richer and more rewarding fields of enquiry.

First, let me define the three types more carefully before deconstructing them. The distinctions between the three positions of exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism are as follows. On one extreme of the spectrum there is exclusivism. This type is defined as holding that only one single revelation is true or one single religion is true and all other revelations or religions are ultimately false. Truth, revelation, and salvation are tightly and explicitly connected. In its most strict logical form, it will mean that, for example, when proposed by certain Southern Baptists, all those who are not Southern Baptists will be lost to the fires of hell.[3] In various softer versions it will allow for possibilities such as a general postmortem confrontation with Christ which gives everyone the chance to choose for or against Christian truth, so as to allow for the possibility of salvation for all. (Already, one of the dividing lines between the types becomes thin and blurred, for an alleged exclusivist like Karl Barth can also coherently be a universalist just like the pluralist, John Hick.[4]) In Buddhist and Hindu versions of exclusivism, a person in a future life will have the opportunity to come to liberation through the process of reincarnation and *karma* when they return as, for example, a *bodhisattva* or *jīvanmuktī*. Such softer versions still keep the basic exclusivist insight intact: that fundamentally only one single revelation or one single religion is true and all other revelations or religions alike are finally false.

On the opposite end of the spectrum is pluralism. This type is defined as holding that all the major religions have true revelations in part, while no single revelation or religion can claim final and definitive truth. This means that all religions are viewed as more or less equally true, and more or less as equally valid paths to salvation. The advantage of this position, argue its supporters, is that it renders genuine respect and autonomy to the various different religions and facilitates good interreligious harmony. In their opinion, this is one of their chief strengths. There are no adherents to this position that I know of who imply uncritical endorsement of every phenomenon that might present itself as religious, such as the People's Temple (of the 1978 Jonestown mass suicide), or the Branch Davidians (of the 1993 Waco massacre), or the Order of the Solar Temple (of the 1994 Swiss mass suicide). Hence, pluralists usually differentiate between very corrupt minor religious cults and the major world religions. Pluralists usually criticize exclusivist positions from their own traditions on two principal points: exclusivists are committed to denying the significance of good, holy, or compassionate people (or whatever sort of description is apt) in other religions; and, further, that exclusivists have incorrect readings of their own sacred texts which misguidedly lead them to exclusivism. The question of the interpretation of texts and experience are the two main points which pluralists usually employ in their revisionary strategies. The order in which these criticisms are developed is sometimes reversible and the details of the argument will, of course, vary.

In the middle of the spectrum are those called inclusivist, who, as is often the case with those in the middle, try to have it both ways. They are committed to claiming that one revelation or religion (sometimes in a specific denominational form) is the only one true and definitive one, but that truth, and therefore salvation, can be found in various, though incomplete, forms within other religions and within their different structures. It is always the case that such different and sometimes rival claims are judged by the criteria arising from the one true revelation or religion, and in fact true rival claims must conform to the true revelation or religion. The traditional implication of this position is that Christianity (or Hinduism, or whichever religion) is regarded as the fulfillment of other religions.

There are important variations within all these types, but this is not relevant to my concern, for I want to suggest that "pluralism" represents a tradition-specific approach that bears all the same features as exclusivism—except that it is western liberal modernity's exclusivism. I will be suggesting later that liberal modernity's response to the fact of diversity is less promising than the form of trinitarian Christianity I am advancing. In this chapter, both Christian and Jewish pluralists will be seen to be Enlightenment exclusivists. (The same cannot be said of the Hindu and Buddhist pluralists.) In so much as they are Enlightenment exclusivists, I shall argue they fail in terms of their own stated intentions: to facilitate better interreligious conversation. Unwittingly, they stifle religious differences within the grand narrative of liberal modernity so that no religion, even their own, is allowed to speak with its full force. One might say, polemically, that they are hard-line exclusivists.

And what of inclusivism? I want to suggest that inclusivism logically collapses into exclusivism in three particular ways. First, inclusivists, like exclusivists, hold that their tradition finally contains the truth regarding ontological, epistemological, and ethical claims. This particular narrative helps to narrate all creation. While inclusivists acknowledge truth elsewhere, it is always mitigated in some form or other, in its own right, such that it cannot be on the same logical level as the truth of, for example, Christianity. This view can be held by both inclusivists and exclusivists, while also acknowledging that the tradition is reformable and capable of a certain erring. In this fundamentally important sense, there is no difference between the two. Second, both inclusivists and exclusivists hold to the inseparability of ontology, epistemology, and ethics such that truth cannot be separated from the mediator: Christ and his church. In so much as a separability is conceded, inclusivists tend toward pluralism. Third, both inclusivists and exclusivists recognize the tradition-specific nature of their enquiry, such that they are committed to defend their position and engage in argument with rival or alternative traditions. The claims they make are taken to be important, for they concern questions of truth. Hence, in the most important logical sense, it is difficult to see what separates these two positions, except for one very important point: inclusivists seek to affirm religions other than Christianity as the means to salvation. (They both, as we have seen, have no problem about the possibility that non-Christians can be saved.)

However, I want to call this inclusivist point into question, not because I do not think non-Christians will be saved, but because I do not think inclusivism is able logically to make this claim for two reasons. If religious traditions are properly to be considered in their unity of practice and theory, and in their organic interrelatedness, then such "totalities" cannot simply be dismembered into parts (be they doctrines, practices, images, or music) which are then taken up and "affirmed" by inclusivists, for the parts will always relate to the whole and will only take their meaning in this

organic context. Hence, what is thus included from a religion being engaged with, is not really that religion *per se*, but a reinterpretation of that tradition in so much as that which is included is now included within a different paradigm, such that its meanings and utilization within that new paradigm can only perhaps bear some analogical resemblance to its meaning and utilization within its original paradigm.

One might substantiate this claim with various historical examples which can be easily furnished from the history of Christianity—and from the histories of most other religions. Interestingly, these various histories are replete with examples of inclusion which are in fact radical transformations of the original. Sikhism is one prime example, where its inclusion of the best of Hinduism and Islam produced a transformation into an entirely new religious tradition. Likewise, Christianity's "inclusion" of Judaism and Islam's "inclusion" of Christianity and Judaism are other examples of this process.

In the preface I noted how MacIntyre traced the emergence of Thomism as the resolution of the tension between Aristotelianism and Augustinianism and various Greek philosophical problems. While Aquinas made much use of Aristotle, it would be odd to think that Aquinas thought that there was any final teleological truth within Aristotelianism *on its own terms*. In fact, his very utilization of Aristotle was to show that while Aristotle discerned much that was good, true, and noble, his was a vision that did not finally grasp the truth which is presented in the gospels. One might say there is both continuity (which is what traditional inclusivism has sought to stress) *and* discontinuity (which is the watchword of exclusivism) in Aquinas's appropriation of Aristotle. And any continuity must always also be framed within a greater discontinuity to be truthful to the realities being understood. Thomism is not Aristotle perfected, but Aristotle reinterpreted and transformed. Aristotle and Aristotelians might well find that they wish to resist Thomism. Dialectics may persuade Thomists, but not necessarily Aristotelians. The basic shift from Aristotle to Aquinas requires both dialectics and faith (rhetoric), an entire paradigm shift.

The point I am making is that inclusivism does not describe well the actual process of historical engagement that takes place when two traditions meet. In affirming something from another tradition, the significance of this affirmation for the affirmer might well be quite different from that given in its original home. In this sense I contest that the other religion as it understands itself is never the object of affirmation by the inclusivist; rather what we have is the inclusivist affirming those elements within another religion that it tends to prize—usually as being reflections of the best parts of itself. This cannot be said really to affirm, both because it is a part and not the whole, and because what is being affirmed is not that tradition as it understands itself, but what the alien theologian chooses to prioritize and select. Here is a simple example: a westerner's affirmation of vegetarianism within Hinduism, and their own subsequent adoption of

vegetarian practice. Nevertheless, a westerner's practice might be connected with ecological motives that are foreign to the Hindu context of vegetarianism that involves concepts of reincarnation, the Sāṃkhya cosmology which associates certain negative spiritual properties with red meats, and so on. Or, take another example. Were Greek concepts of substance simply and uncritically used by Christians to say what they wanted to about God in Christ, or did they actually employ, develop, and modify these concepts in a novel and unique manner? I think the latter, and in this sense, Greek philosophy was not being celebrated in its own right, nor seen as a legitimate salvific structure.

I will return to this part of the overall argument in chapter two to show how a pluralist unveiled will himself resist the title of inclusivism—and rightly so. This will provide a good test case for my argument. So let me now turn to the first of my two representative Christian pluralists, the Presbyterian theologian-philosopher John Hick.

JOHN HICK'S LIBERAL INTOLERANCE

John Hick is one of the most influential and highly developed pluralists. His writings on the subject span nearly two decades and his position has developed over this time. His current position is to be found in its magisterial entirety in *An Interpretation of Religions* (1990). This huge book is based on Hick's Gifford Lectures of 1986-87. It contains considerable indological, philosophical, and theological arguments, but in what follows I shall be dealing with one aspect only—his argument for pluralism. Initially, Hick tells us that he began as a conservative exclusivist Christian. Over the years he made a pilgrimage through to pluralism, which itself has undergone considerable development, culminating in his recent book.[5]

To put Hick's radical pluralism into perspective, it will be helpful to trace briefly its genesis. In 1973, using an astronomical analogy, Hick suggested a Copernican revolution in the Christian theology of religions whereby Christians should "shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the center to the realization that it is *God* who is at center, and that all religions . . . including our own, serve and revolve around him."[6] The earlier "Ptolemaic" dogmas placed the Church and Christ as the source of and means to salvation. According to Hick, these dogmas became increasingly implausible in the light of the truth and holiness evident in other religions. They also contradict the Christian belief in a God who loves all people. Hence the Copernican revolution marked a shift from *ecclesio*centrism and *Christo*centrism to *theo*centrism, analogous to the monumental paradigm shift in astronomy precipitated by Copernicus. Hick never defined theocentrism in terms of trinitarianism, which indicates that the problem I shall locate in his work was well in place, even in these earliest stages. To return to the exposition: God, not Christ or the Church, should be the

center of the universe of faiths. Hick suggested that this paradigmatic shift would facilitate a new understanding of religions whereby claims to superiority and exclusivity would dissolve. A new era of interreligious ecumenism would dawn.

To facilitate this theocentric move Hick had to decenter the incarnation. Basically, Hick's argument is that Jesus should not be seen as God incarnate. Instead, the divinity of Christ should be viewed mythologically. Hick's definition of myth is important and plays a major role in his later thinking. He defined myth as:

> a story which is told but which is not literally true, or an idea or image which is applied to something or someone but which does not literally apply, but which invites a particular attitude in its hearers. Thus the truth of a myth is a kind of practical truth consisting in the appropriateness of the attitude which it evokes.[7]

Hence, Jesus' divinity is a mythological construct that expresses the literal truth that "God has been encountered through Jesus" which is "not an assertion of unique saving effectiveness in human life, but a particular redemption-myth attached to one great historical way of salvation."[8] Hick seems to employ a purely instrumentalist view of religious discourse, by which language is seen as an expression of intentions, attitudes, or particular programs, but not concerned with making cognitive claims about any ontological reality, analogically or otherwise. This instrumentalist view is a child of modernity, in so much as the ontological claims of religions are negated, and religion's only usefulness lies in its ethical force, which is possible to replicate without the particular trappings of religion. The latter was Kant's argument. Hick seems untroubled by the literal statements that he uses, such as "God has been encountered through Jesus." What is significant at this stage is Hick's maintaining the reality of God at the center of salvation—although whose "god" remains unclear.

Hick's latest writings signal a radical shift away from *theo*centrism to what he calls *Reality*centeredness. (All subsequent page references in the text are to *An Interpretation of Religion*). He argues that all religions are salvific paths to the one Divine "Real," none being better or worse and none with a privileged or exclusive revelation, despite what some of their adherents may claim. The word "Real" or "Reality" better expresses the fact that the Divine cannot be ultimately regarded as personal (theistic) or impersonal (non-theistic). This crucial move occurred in Hick's pilgrimage as a result of dealing with the objection that Hick was a covert theist, for his Copernican revolution did not accommodate non-theistic religions. How could it, if he contended that all religions represented different paths to the one all-loving *God*?

To overcome this difficulty, Hick developed a Kantian-type distinction between the noumenal, which exists independently and outside of human

perception, and the phenomenal world, which is that world as it appears to our human consciousness (246 ff.). The varying phenomenal responses within the different religious traditions, both theistic and non-theistic, are to be viewed as authentic but different responses to the noumenal Real. Hence, according to Hick, we cannot say that the "Real *an sich* (in itself) has the characteristics displayed by its manifestations, such as (in the case of the heavenly Father) love and justice or (in the case of Brahman) consciousness and bliss" (247). So just what does this talk about a "heavenly Father" amount to? Once again, the notion of myth is utilized to deal with the problem, but now it is applied not only to the incarnation, but to the very idea of God; and is further extended to the ultimate realities designated by the various religions, such as the Hindu Brahman, or Allāh in Islam, Yahweh in Judaism, and so on (343-61). Therefore, in Hick's view, speech about our "heavenly Father" is:

> mythological speech about the Real. I define a myth as a story or statement which is not literally true but which tends to evoke an appropriate dispositional attitude to its subject matter. Thus the truth of a myth is a practical truthfulness: a true myth is one which rightly relates us to a reality about which we cannot speak in non-mythological terms (248).

With this Kantian distinction in place Hick effectively severs any ontological connection between our human language and the divine reality, and introduces an entirely instrumental use of religious language. Some critics rightly note the establishment of Hick's Kantian epistemology well before his dealing with the questions of religious pluralism.[9] According to Hick all the world religions encourage us to turn away from the Self toward the Divine Reality, engendering love and compassion toward all people. The common soteriological goal is thereby matched by a common ethical goal which therefore confirms the pluralistic thesis.

Hick's "pluralism" masks the advocation of liberal modernity's "god," in this case a form of ethical agnosticism. If ethical agnostics were to suggest that the conflict between religions would be best dealt with by everyone becoming an ethical agnostic, not only would this fail to deal with plurality, in so much as it fails to take plurality seriously, it would also fail to take religious cultures seriously by dissolving them into instrumental mythical configurations best understood within modernity's mastercode. This mythologizing hermeneutic bears the marks of what Roland Barthes, in his important book, *Mythologies*, has called the "rhetorical forms" of "bourgeois myth."[10] (All subsequent page references in the text are to *Mythologies*.) Barthes sees this hermeneutic as one of the marks of liberal modernity, and using Barthes's analysis helps to reinforce and illuminate my overall argument. Underlying this myth, according to Barthes, is the attempt to turn history into "Essences," a restless drive which will not cease

until modernity has "fixated this world into an object which can be forever possessed, catalogued its riches, embalmed it, and injected into reality some purifying essence which will stop its transformation" (155). This tendency toward essentialism in the theology of religions ironically hastens the closure of dialogue rather than offering a new beginning. Hick's system has already begun the process of cataloging history and making religions conform to the schema of pluralism so that they can be possessed by the mythologizer.

The notion of myth is first applied to the incarnation to decenter it so as to facilitate Hick's move to theocentrism. But now Hick has to decenter theocentrism (God) in order to facilitate his move to "the Real." All theistic traditions must undergo Hick's mythologizing hermeneutic, as well as the non-theistic traditions, for they, too, cannot claim any privileged access to reality, except on the terms stipulated by the pluralist framework. This deprivileging of the particular is a major theme within modernity's reinterpretation of Christianity. If the adherents of world religions are not allowed to make fundamental ontological claims with their full force and implications, then harmony is arrived at through the destruction and neutralizing of the Other. Barthes writes that one rhetorical form of bourgeois mythology is that it is "unable to imagine the Other." If the pluralist mythographer comes face to face with the Other, "he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself . . . all experiences of confrontation are reverberating, any otherness is reduced to sameness" (151).

This is indeed the effect of Hick's mythologizing hermeneutic: it seems to ignore or deny the really difficult conflicting truth claims by, in effect, reducing them to sameness: i.e., they are all mythological assertions. All religious people should view their religions as does the mythographer. If they do not, then they cannot be accounted for in this schema and are seen as holding false views about the nature of their doctrines and truth claims.[11] Underlying this form of pluralism is an implicit epistemology (that God cannot choose to reveal God's self in the particular), and its concomitant ontology (God cannot be known in history, with its attendant deism or agnosticism), and its espousal of a universal ethic that should be followed by all rational men and women. The golden rule, do unto others as you would have them do to you, claimed by Hick to operate in all religions (325), is of course an empty formal injunction. It specifies no *telos*, only the formal requirement that free subjects should be allowed to act freely. The *telos*, what is good for you and me, and the habits of virtue required to inhabit such a role, as well as the type of social organization that might support these roles, such that we might participate in the good, is left ambiguous. The point is: how does each person actually understand and practice the various "goals" that are formulated within their different traditions? MacIntyre, as we saw earlier, has argued that once "goals" are detached from their narrative contexts, as was the Kantian procedure, they cannot

properly be justified, so that emotivism is the inevitable outcome.

Barthes also notes that this type of myth "consists of stating two opposites and balancing the one by the other so as to reject them both" (153). Here again the analogy is clear. One can see the way in which reifications such as theism (as if this were one "thing" in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and non-theism are balanced in Hick's schema only, in fact, by rejecting them both. The balance in Hick's schema amounts to something quite different from theism or non-theism; it amounts to agnosticism. Hick is led into agnosticism when he presses the distinction, and severs the link, between the Real *in itself* and its various phenomenal manifestations *in relation* to humankind. He writes: "It follows from this distinction between the Real as it is in itself and as it is thought and experienced through our religious concepts that we cannot apply to the Real *an sich* (in itself) the characteristics encountered in its various manifestations" (246). The outcome leaves Hick with no real access to "the Real." The ways of analogy and metaphor, for example, are rendered impotent. This inability to speak of the Real *or* even allow "it" the possibility of self-utterance leads to the Real's redundancy. Ironically, any detailed and serious interest in the religions of the world is subverted as they are unable to furnish clues about the Real. The color, diversity, difference, and detail are bleached of their meaning, for the Real apparently resists all description and is incapable of self-utterance.

This outcome has a close analogue with Barthes's description of yet another rhetorical form of mythology. It is that "the accidental failure of language is magically identified with what one decides is a natural resistance of the object" (151). This maneuver, which Barthes calls tautology, "creates a dead, a motionless world." Hick's system does this precisely because it has decided all things in advance; every form of religion is cataloged and encoded into modernity's narrative of time, space, and history. The history and particularities of the various traditions are just icing on a cake, already tasted, known, and digested. The many intractable particularities of the religions with their unique histories and traditions are drained of their power.

It is precisely this absolute incomprehensibility regarding the nature of Reality that genealogically locates Hick's pluralist project. It mystifies, rather than illuminates, the nature of the Real. Similarly, Kant had to face the question of how he could claim to know that there is a correspondence between phenomena and things in themselves, and to know that the latter acts upon our consciousness. Agnosticism is the inevitable outcome of the trajectory of Hick's flight from particularity, first from the particularity of the incarnation, then from the particularity of a theistic God, and then from the particularity of any religious claim, be it Christian or non-Christian. The outcome of the escape from particularity can only be into nothing in particular, or in Barthes's words, "history evaporates" under the power of the myth (151).

It would seem then that the Real's invulnerability leads also to its redundancy. Only the moral human activity of turning away from self is left, although with less and less tradition-specific narration regarding what this turning away from self might involve. Here, finally, we arrive at the ethical counterpart to Kant's ontological agnosticism. In the same way that all religions are seen as ultimately related to one and the same "Real," despite their considerable differences and intractable particularities, so, too, there is an ethical counterpart to this claim. We are told that despite all the differences in injunctions to act and follow specific ways of life enjoined by each particular tradition, the religions are ultimately united in putting forward the same ethical principles that will provide the basis to unite them in a new harmony. Hick finds that all the great traditions teach "love, compassion, self-sacrificing, concern for the good of others, generous kindness and forgiveness" (325). It is perhaps not surprising that Hick has to sever these values from their tradition-specific narrative contexts. He writes tellingly that the above ideal "is not an alien ideal imposed by supernatural authority but one arising out of our human nature" (325), and which happens to concur with the "modern liberal moral outlook" (330). This latter alignment, the "coincidental" relation between the way things are (nature) and modern liberalism (the transparent description of that "nature"), even more clearly reveals Hick's tradition-specific starting point. The basic criterion for judging salvific religions is, therefore, a commonly accepted set of values which are rooted in human nature and modern liberalism, not in any authority within differing religious constructions of "what is."

There are two points that should be made about this ethical turn in Hick's work, which I shall develop in relation to Paul Knitter's work in the next section. The first is that the system, in Barthes's words, "continuously transforms the products of history into essential types" and when it has done this, deems them to be "Nature" (155). One then proceeds to call in Nature to adjudicate matters of controversy (e.g., as to which are salvific religions) and impartiality is apparently achieved at the same time. This maneuver continues the process of essentialism first noticed in ontology and now found in ethics, a maneuver which seeks to occlude and erase the particularities of history and the uniqueness of religious traditions. For example, those religions where ethics is viewed as intrinsically related to the life of the community, in response to a particular revelation, and which, therefore, place a significant emphasis on the precise narrative context of ethics rather than its instrumental outcome, such as Thomistic virtue ethics, are marginalized and occluded within Hick's system.

Second, the specificity of the ethical agenda and its political and social baggage go unnoticed, for it is claimed that this ethical approach is impartial and favors all equally. I have been trying to show that it does not, and that it masks a highly specified form of liberal modernity. Others have also noted these same features and accused Hick of bourgeois politics.[12] In using Barthes I have tried to indicate that it is not by chance that Hick's

mythologizing program shares the characteristics of modernity in what Barthes calls the "bourgeois myth." Hick's Enlightenment exclusivism stems from his Kantian epistemology and establishes his ontological agnosticism. This eventually drives him into a foundational turn toward ethics. Knitter, in contrast, wants to start with ethics. If we see the emergence of modernity over Christianity in Hick's work, does the Roman Catholic eco-liberation theologian, Paul Knitter, fare any better?

PAUL KNITTER'S ECO-LIBERATION APPROACH

Paul Knitter, a good friend and general editor of the *Faith Meets Faith Series*, like John Hick, went through a pilgrimage from exclusivism and inclusivism to pluralism. He has also gone on a further excursion within pluralism, from a theocentrism, of Hick's Copernican type with "God" at the center of the different religions, to a liberation-eco-theological form of pluralism. In this last stage, the divine is to be found in socio-political-ecological emancipatory movements and "mother-earth" affirms and guides this process. While I find Knitter's stress on the poor and the environment absolutely important, I shall be showing why his form of theology actually hinders his political intentions. I shall be arguing that Knitter's proposal is wedded to the Enlightenment project begun by Kant, such that a universal ethical imperative is prioritized over metaphysics and religion—not unlike Hick's project.[13] All people are subject to this ethical "ought," prior to their formation within religious communities, and the value of their formation within such communities is judged by their ability to respond to this ethical imperative. The alleged attractiveness of this Kantian path, when originally developed by Kant, was its appeal to common universals, beyond the petty sectarian interests of religious groups. Jesus Christ, within this schema, became a representative of truths already known and not, as in most orthodox forms of Christianity, constitutive of truth. Knitter adds an ecological twist to this story but never really departs from it, as his ecological argument is closely allied to modernity's sacralization of science as the determinative master-code. Knitter's project therefore fails, in my opinion, for it appears as an appeal to the religions to band together to fight a common enemy, but this maneuver conceals the real nature of Knitter's Trojan Horse; the presuppositions of the project are corrosive to the religions, or to be specific, to trinitarian Christianity which resists Kant and the secular authoritarianism of modernity. Interestingly, those from other religions have expressed analogous misgivings.[14]

First, let me outline the argument Knitter presents in his important two volume work: (Volume 1) *One Earth Many Religions. Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (1995), and (Volume 2) *Jesus and the Other Names* (1996).[15] (Page references in the text; the 1 or 2 prefacing the page number indicates the volume number.) *One Earth* opens with a moving and

interesting autobiography in which Knitter plots his pilgrimage and conversions in the theology of religions. He started as an exclusivist wanting to convert heathens and bring them to the light of the gospel (1:3). Very soon, through experience and reflection he became a Rahnerian inclusivist (1:5), but this turned into a bridge that led him into pluralism, initially of a Hickian type. In *No Other Name?* (1985) Knitter was defending theocentrism against ecclesiocentrism or Christocentrism (which had marked his early stages), arguing that God was greater than any one mediator, including Jesus, and that "other religions may have their own valid views of and responses to this Mystery" (1:8). Soon he was deeply immersed in liberation theology and began developing a liberation theology of religions in his contribution to *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (1987), which he felt steered away from John Hick's position in one important respect: rather than arguing that there was a common core to the religions, he began to argue that all religions are to be judged as to their salvific efficacy in so far as they promote the "kingdom," characterized by justice, peace, and goodness in both personal relations and socio-economic structures.[16]

Knitter's two volumes mark a new stage in his odyssey, extending his version of liberation theology to include ecological justice:

> I will be urging that religious persons seek to understand and speak with each other on the *basis of a common commitment* to human and ecological well-being. Global responsibility therefore includes the notion of liberation intended by traditional liberation theologians but goes beyond it in seeking not just social justice but eco-human justice and well-being; it does so aware that such a project, in order truly to attend to the needs of all the globe, *must* be an effort by the entire globe and all its nations and religions (1:15, my emphasis).

The argument of the first book is that *suffering* and *eco-balance* are unmediated and primary universals, prior to religious and cultural formation, that call for global cooperative action. If the religions and the nations of the earth cannot respond to these two universally felt problems, together and in cooperation, then we will face extinction. In so much as the religions alleviate suffering personally and socio-economically, and tend to the earth's well being (which is also our well being), they are channels of salvation. However, one needs critically to examine these two universals, for the notion that they are unmediated should immediately remind us that they probably belong to an Encyclopedic genealogy. Knitter argues that suffering is universally experienced: "Suffering has a universality and immediacy that makes it the most suitable, and necessary, site for establishing common ground for interreligious encounter" (1:89). Hence, there is a prior universal experience more primary than any interpretation which forms a common human experience/essence.[17]

This attempt to provide a foundational narrative within which all religions can find their place is even more strongly stated when it comes to eco-well-being. Here we see the exaltation of science as the mastercode within which religions will find themselves interpreted. According to Knitter, the story of the universe related by science acts as a "transcultural religious story," "providing all religions with a *common creation myth*" (1:119). Furthermore, this new mastercode, or as Knitter calls it "a shared religious story," generates a "common ethical story":

> This Earth provides the religions not only with a religious community in which they can share myths of origin, but also with an ethical community in which they can identify and defend common criteria of truth. In their basic content, such criteria will probably be something like those being worked out by international ecological groups, especially non-governmental (1:123).

Non-governmental environmental groups become the new guardians of common truth, and their lack of partisanship (in being non-governmental) is in keeping with this refusal of tradition-specific forms of enquiry and description. Speaking of the interreligious earth summit in Rio de Janeiro (1992) where it was declared that "For the first time in our history, we have empirical evidence for a common creation story," Knitter does not question this highly contentious statement, but instead comments:

> They were announcing on the international level what some theologians have been saying among themselves and their communities: science, in what it tells us about how the universe originated and how it works, is providing all religions with a *common creation myth*. What Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme call the universe story can function as a transcultural religious story[18] (1:119).

Volume 1 ends on this prophetic note, echoing Hans Küng's call for a global ethics. Before outlining volume 2, *Jesus and the Other Names*, I would like to make three observations. First, the fact that Knitter can relegate Christology to the second volume such that the main task there will be to offer a Christology that responds to a predefined crisis and a solution that is already known, such that Christ becomes a resource to support the solution, rather than ever challenging the articulation of the crisis and its alleged solution, suggests that Knitter's Christology serves an ideological cause. This is betrayed in his assumption that one can analyze the world and its problems apart from theological and ecclesiological categories. Hence, Knitter is able to state the problems and partial solutions, and only then asks: does Jesus fit into this schema? This suggests that the Kantian project is well in place, an intuition that is further confirmed when we turn to Knitter's *representative* Christology in volume 2, where Jesus represents

precisely the global values of peace, justice, and love that are required by Knitter's global analysis carried out in volume 1; and these values are detachable from Jesus' person and his church. To bring into relief this pattern of modernity I need to locate the foundational ethical universals that steer the Kantian motor—which leads to my second observation.

The main argument of volume 1 is an appeal to universals ("suffering" and the "earth") that are unmediated by cultural construction which lead to ethical obligations that are universally binding. This structure mirrors the Kantian attempt to cut through particularity, and to found ethics (and therefore religion) on a universal foundational site. It is worth noting that Knitter's new ecologism, the second of his universals, is not a departure from this Kantian project but a reiteration of it, in privileging scientific discourse as establishing modern cultural hegemony. That is why Knitter fails to recognize modernity's imperialism when he writes with a sense of liberation: "science, in what it tells us about how the universe originated and how it works, is providing all religions with a *common creation myth*" (1:119). This fails to recognize that the scientific story is also a culturally constructed one which cannot claim uncontested mastercode status (providing all religions with their story) unless it denies its historical situatedness; which it does, when it appears as "the Earth itself" (note the capital letter for Earth) narrating a "common cosmological story" (1:119)—even if it is through the particular mouths of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme. John Milbank criticizes this form of scientific modernity in the following manner:

> After the collapse of the medieval consensus, faced with the difficulties of containing the conflicts amongst communities of diverse belief, the early modern age already fled to the arms of nature as support for a new objectivity. . . . Displacement towards nature was therefore in place from the outset of modernity, although "nature" was also from the outset a cultural construct: initially a disguised projection of a new mode of human power.[19]

The danger of divinizing the Earth coupled with claiming the Earth's unitary and authoritative voice is always at the margins of Knitter's project. A further feature of this tendency is either to gloss over the chaotic and bloody destruction present in nature, or alternatively, to see this as intrinsic to the process, thereby legitimating violence as required by or as necessary to the sacred. This sacralizing of violence runs counter to the explicit intentions of groups usually holding such theories and is certainly not Knitter's intention, but is inevitable in so much as there is an endorsement of "the human" and "nature" without any reference to sin. Furthermore, such a strategy fails to recognize that nature is culturally constructed, and therefore constructed very differently by different traditions at various times in their history. Compare for example, the Christian *ex nihilo* doctrine with

the cosmic dualism in Zoroastrianism, and *māyā* within Śankara and Rāmānuja in Vedāntic Hinduism.[20] Furthermore, such constructions suggest differing patterns of relationship to the natural and cultural world which cannot always be theoretically predicted in advance.[21] Knitter unwittingly perpetuates modernity's project in employing unmediated foundational ethical universals, and he is driven to this in trying to find a universal site for interreligious agreement. The problem is that he constructs such a site, rather than naturally finds it. This leads to my third observation.

Concomitant with the apparent discovery of such universal ethical "oughts" regarding suffering and the earth, there are co-related *right actions*. And such right actions become a new foundational and universal site, so that religion and metaphysics serve an already organized practice. Knitter often calls this the "priority of praxis" and my point here relates to my earlier one regarding Knitter's Christology serving a hidden ideology. Knitter knows what is required, even if outlined at a very low level of specification. He does not examine in any detail the various non-governmental environmental groups that form the vanguard of truth. Hence, the job for theologians is to find models and theologies that will support this already endorsed praxis. Kant envisaged a similar job for historical religions, and some forms of liberation theology are often in danger of replicating this same pattern.[22] Take the following quotation, for example:

> If followers of various religious traditions can agree *in the beginning* that *whatever else* their experience of truth or of the Divine or of Enlightenment may *bring about*, it *must* always promote greater eco-human well-being and help remove the sufferings of our world, then they have a shared reference point from which to affirm or criticize each other's claims (1:127, my emphases).

The logic here is that regardless of what each religion believes and practices as a result of its beliefs and practices, it must nevertheless, first and foremost, believe and practice eco-human justice! Right practice is self-evident. It is not surprising that one main theological challenge to this view derives from an Aristotelian virtue ethics approach in which the relationship of action, theory, and goods is very differently construed. Here the *telos* of action is understood in terms of the goods that are internal to particular types of activity, not in their outcome—consequentialism and pragmatism. And this *telos*, in Aquinas's utilization of Aristotle, is fundamentally part of the human-divine drama, not prior to it, for there could be no "prior." Whether my suspicions regarding Knitter's ethics are misplaced will in part be answered as I now turn to his Christology in volume 2, *Jesus and the Other Names*.

In volume 2, Knitter's basic argument is already in place: those religions that promote socio-ecological justice are channels of salvation. Christianity needs to rethink itself to conform to this view. Hence, this second volume maintains the pluralist case that Christians must stop claiming that salvation is from Christ and recognize multinormed sources of salvation. Typically of Knitter, he scrupulously outlines the many criticisms made of his Christology (chapter 3) before embarking on a "revisionist" Christology that reaffirms the "uniqueness" of Christ (attempting to satisfy critics), while still holding to a "pluralist" position—that Jesus is one savior amongst many equal saviors (chapters 4 and 5). The conclusion is put in this fashion: Jesus "does bring a universal, decisive, indispensable message"[23] (note that in one clear sense, he is an information bringer, detachable from the information/message that he brings), *and* that probably "there are *other* universal, decisive, indispensable manifestations of divine reality besides Jesus" (2:79). The basic metaphor in his argument is that fidelity to Jesus is like fidelity to one's spouse. By utterly committing ourselves to this particular person we are released to be engaged with others in all sorts of fruitful and creative ways and need not deny others their own particular and ultimate commitments. Likewise, Jesus is truly divine, but not the only divine figure; and Jesus offers salvation in a unique manner, but so do the Buddha and the Qur'an.

Knitter's Christological argument here seems to follow the Kantian pattern: all historical religions have their place in so much as they conform to the universal ethical imperative. For Kant, Jesus is the best representation of the ethical imperative. For Knitter, Jesus is the best response that he personally knows and experiences. Unlike Kant, Knitter is willing to concede that there are, no doubt, other equally good responses.[24] The Kantian notion of religion as subjective taste, an accident of particularity and culture is perpetuated in Knitter's use of the analogy about marriage as akin to religion.[25] This is the inevitable outcome of representative Christologies that are a product of modernity's erosion of the Christian narrative. What I have been arguing is that the Christian narrative has been replaced by that of modernity's. Knitter comes closest to recognizing what is at stake here when, in his later chapter on mission, he identifies a crucial issue: the difference between representative and constitutive Christologies. This is an important paragraph, so I shall quote it at length:

> Official Roman Catholic teaching has in no way opened itself to the possibility of a *representational christology* that holds up Jesus as a decisive representation or embodiment or revelation of God's saving love—a love that "predates" Jesus and is "unbounded" and universally active by the very nature of God and of creation (Ogden 1994, 9-10). Rather, the official Magisterium has adhered to a *constitutive christology*, according to which Jesus, especially in his death and resurrection, causes or constitutes the universal availability of God's salvific love. Without Jesus such love would not be active in the world; whatever experience of Divine Presence is realized in the world has to be seen as caused by Jesus and necessarily in need of ful-

filment through membership in the church. Because Jesus *constitutes* and not just *represents* God's saving activity, Jesus has to be proclaimed as "full, definitive, unsurpassable" (2:133).[26]

Perhaps one reason why mainstream Roman Catholic theology has not opened itself to adopting a representative Christology is because it recognizes that this would be a departure from the fact that the Christian tradition takes its orientation from the trinitarian God disclosed in the narratives of the early church regarding the person of Jesus Christ and the community that he formed and which helped form him. The early church did not have a narrative into which they then inserted the story of Christ. Indeed, such a process was constantly, though not always successfully, resisted in the various forms of adoptionism and gnosticism. Christ does not "represent" God, but "is" God's very self-revelation as triune. If he is a representative, then we are able to access God without God's self being offered to us; we are, as it were, able to get behind the sign to the reality. In contrast, constitutive Christology makes the point that the signifier in this unique case, is the signified, although it is not in any sense a closed signifier or signified, because the very nature of this trinitarian sign is that it invites interrelationships with all signs within creation. I shall return to this argument later. However, to continue my point here briefly, the danger in representative Christologies is that the signified is possessed prior to Jesus, such that Jesus is seen to be an "embodiment or representation" (1:133) of what is already known prior to him. This is perhaps why volume 2, on Christology, follows volume 1, in which right values and actions have already been foundationally located. That is why one of the features of representative Christologies is the ability to abstract values and teachings from the person of Christ, so that it is his message that is all important, not his work and person, and not his resurrected body which continues in the church, the "body of Christ."[27]

At one point, in a footnote, Knitter seems to acknowledge that there is truth that could correct Christ—which is not surprising, given the logic of his project, but it is surprising as a Christian claim. He writes:

> When I called for a nonnormative christology I had in mind the traditional understanding of normativity: that Christ is a *norma nomans non normata*—a norm that norms all others but is not normed itself. I should have said more clearly than I did that I would endorse an understanding of Jesus as a *norma normans et normata*—a norm that norms others but can also be normed itself (2:169, note 9).

If there is an authority apart from Christ, then Christ is subject to something that is more normative than he, which would imply that God is subject to a more truthful and more authoritative criterion than God. (Making such a point does not commit me to any positivist or foundational account of revelation or to deny that revelation is always mediated.) Knitter's qualification regarding Jesus as norm, just cited, constitutes no real change from his early position which called for a non-normative Christology (akin to Hick's early mythologizing of the incarnation), and further justifies my claim that the Enlightenment ghost drives his Christological project.

One more feature corroborates my argument. Why does Knitter reject a constitutive Christology? The obvious answer is that he believes that the New Testament does not justify one. I have no doubt at all about Knitter's scholarly integrity here, but I want to suggest that in the plot of his book he has already decided against a constitutive Christology entirely apart from the New Testament and apart from the authority of the church. The reason is that *constitutive Christologies are not universal sites*, for they prioritize the particular and this "sectarianism" is unacceptable to Knitter. Hence, for Knitter, prioritizing the particular runs contrary to the spirit of global dialogue: "So it seems to me that traditional Christian announcements of Jesus as final, full, and unsurpassable must be, to say the least, a threat to dialogue." He continues that this runs contrary to what "is felt today to be a *moral imperative*. Anything that makes such a dialogue problematic is a problem itself" (2:62).

The logic here is that regardless of any evidence or theological reasoning, constitutive Christologies are inadmissible as they threaten the "moral imperative" (note the universal Kantian tone) that is "felt today" (by whom?). This may very likely mean that only modern liberals within the religious traditions are *allowed* to participate at Knitter's global dialogue table, for if they are not modern liberals, then they are a "threat to dialogue." I do not wish to overplay this point, but want to situate Knitter's position and its implications within the Kantian Enlightenment mastercode from whence it derives. In so much as this is the case, Knitter propounds a fundamentally non-religious form of exclusivism. In fact, as with Hick's project, it is unwittingly unhelpful in addressing the ecological, political, and interreligious tensions it tries to diffuse, for it excludes those very groups (the religions) in the process of reconciliation and peace making, by demanding that they be baptized in modernity before coming to the dialogue. In this respect, Hick and Knitter's pluralism fails not only because it cannot attain its own stated objectives (openness, tolerance, and equality of the religions); it also fails because it is a highly tradition-specific form of argument that has implicit and explicit ontological, ethical, and epistemological presuppositions that implicitly or explicitly contest alternative assumptions. It cannot but fail. Furthermore, this failure also illustrates the victory of modernity in these engagements with Christianity in generating "Christian positions" that have become detached from the trinitarian God and instead expound modernity's god.

Finally, I want to return briefly to one aspect of the issue of constitutive Christologies. For any viable theology of religions, in contrast to Knitter's project, a constituitive Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology, would

have to be considerably developed. It may seem oblique to turn to such fundamental questions as the nature of revelation when the environment is being destroyed and suffering ravages our earth. However, it is my contention that Christian revelation is about God and created human persons, because the incarnation begins to show us what it is to be truly human, by being fully responsive to the true God, such that questions regarding socio-ecological well-being are actually properly shaped and responded to once we begin to attend to revelation, which is always a lived practice. And this, I believe, takes us to the heart of the problem: for central to the Enlightenment project is a fundamental epistemological and ontological rupture that denies the possibility of God's self-revelation in the historically particular.

If I read Knitter correctly, what he cannot accept is that God may have chosen to make himself present in Jesus Christ such that *all* history and culture are to be reconfigured through this particular narrative. Perhaps one reason for this is his supposition that this narrative is completed and hermetically sealed, for he often implies that constitutive Christologies are static, self-sufficient and fully complete packages of truth (2: 62, 72-6). I do not think one can find much evidence for such a portrayal within orthodox Roman Catholic Christologies, but in so much as this is found by Knitter, then Knitter's reaction to it is entirely understandable. However, let me briefly indicate why I think such "closure" is actually alien to Christian revelation.

To take, what I hope is a difficult example, one might cite the Roman Catholic teaching that revelation "was closed with the death of the last Apostles" (Denzinger 2020), reiterated again in Vatican II.[28] This teaching would, on the surface, seem to corroborate Knitter's point. But does it? I think not. Rather, I suggest that it indicates an important presupposition in the claim that God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. That is, if God has truly revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, then we can expect no new revelation as such, for the plenitude of God's being is present in Christ, although this does *not* act as a barrier to acknowledging God's presence in different modalities throughout creation. Hence the "closed" operates centrifugally to relate *all* truth as being present, hidden, disclosed, and concealed in Christ *in so much* as God is present in Christ. Such a teaching does not exclude all manner of truth and light within cultures and religions. Karl Rahner, when discussing the teaching that revelation was "closed" with the death of the last apostles, says the following:

> *Now* there is nothing more to come: no new age, no other aeon, no fresh plan of salvation, but only the unveiling of what is already "here" as God's presence at the end of a human time stretched out to breaking point. . . . It is because the definitive Reality which resolves history proper is already here that Revelation is "closed." *Closed, because open to the concealed presence of divine plenitude in Christ.*[29]

Rahner rightly stresses the positive nature of "closed" when he adds: "That revelation has been closed is a positive and not a negative statement, a pure Amen, a conclusion *which includes everything and excludes nothing* of the divine plenitude, conclusion as fulfilled presence of an all-embracing plenitude."[30] Rahner's quotation serves to highlight the dual logic within this teaching. First, in principle nothing can dispose of and overturn revelation—if revelation is revelation. If the economic trinity is the immanent trinity (but not vice versa, contrary to Rahner) then we cannot discover anything new about God, *in the sense* of ontologically unrelated or contradictory to Christ. I would argue that in making this claim, which is an ecclesiological and trinitarian claim, there is no need to take refuge in a positivist account of revelation which denies that revelation is mediated in human culture and through human persons, or to resort to a theory that maintains there is a final transcultural or acultural formulation of revelation. If that were so, one moment of human history would be divinized exclusively at the cost of the rest of history, whereas Christian practice is, or should be, a participation in the event of the incarnation, a furthering of this event. I return to this point in chapter four.

In conclusion, I have tried to establish three important points so far. First, that when Christian theologies of religions have assimilated themselves to modernity rather than the triune God, they end up representing modernity's gods: agnosticism (in the case of Hick) and a form of neo-pagan-unitarianism (Knitter). Second, in so much as their positions actually advance modernity's project, rather than Christianity's engagement with difference, they deny or obliterate difference and Otherness. In Hick's case, he mythologizes the differences away so that the religions can be fitted into his system. In Knitter's case, the religions are all judged by allegedly self-evident criteria that are found in the eco-system. Both Hick and Knitter know the full truth and what is ethically required of the religions independently of any of the religions. Third, and as a consequence, their pluralism turns out to be a strong form of Kantian exclusivist modernity. It cannot succeed in its claims to be more tolerant and open than forms of Christian trinitarian theology. What really is at stake is the question of whether Christianity can be genuinely open toward the Other, such as to both learn from and critically engage with difference. To this task, we return in chapter four.

However, before concluding this chapter I want to now show how Hick's pluralism is thoroughly modernist and not Christian in so much as it is transferable and can be defended by a Jew, Buddhist, Hindu or, in principle, by liberal modernists within any religious tradition. "God" is not trinitarian nor specific to any orthodox tradition, except the Encyclopedic. I have chosen a Jewish thinker, Rabbi Professor Dan Cohn-Sherbok, not because he is in any way representative of mainstream Judaism, but because in his minor differences from Hick, he seems to acknowledge his debt to the Encyclopedic tradition, and consequently invites even more

objections. In thus extending the discussion, I am able to consider a Jewish pluralist and also then respond to Hick's response to the argument I have advanced in this chapter.[31]

DAN COHN-SHERBOK'S RELATIVIZING JEWISH PLURALISM

It is difficult to find Jewish pluralists and in my reading, Dan Cohn-Sherbok is almost unique within Judaism. His main work on this subject is *Judaism and Other Faiths* (1994) (page references from this book given in the text), although I shall refer to his other writings.[32] There are some Jews who are pluralists exclusively in regard to Christianity; that is, they put Christianity and Judaism on an equal par, but not in regard to other religions. Hence, in a strict sense it would be inappropriate to call them pluralists.[33] Cohn-Sherbok is a Reform rabbi, but he promotes what he elsewhere calls "Open Judaism," in contrast to a number of differing existing historical traditions within contemporary Judaism.[34]

Cohn-Sherbok fits rather well into my analysis as he explicitly adopts the threefold paradigm of pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism from the debate in Christianity and sees this model as apt and appropriate to analyze Jewish responses to other religions (20 ff.). Cohn-Sherbok suggests that exclusivism "is consonant with the attitude of many Jews in the past" (21). "On this view Judaism is absolutely true—its source is God" and "it excludes the possibility of God revealing himself to others" (21). He then poses the following theological problem to such a position: "If God is the providential Lord of history, it is difficult to understand why he would have hidden his presence and withheld his revelation from humanity—except for the Jews" (21).[35] He then outlines inclusivism, which he shows to be a widespread position among many contemporary Jewish writers and is also found throughout the history of the Jewish tradition:[36] "Judaism would on this view be regarded as ultimately true; its doctrines would serve as a basis for testing the validity of all alleged revelations" (22). Cohn-Sherbok's criticism of inclusivism is that it still "does not do full justice to God's nature as a loving father who truly cares for all his creation. On this model, it is the Jewish people who really matter" (23).

Finally, he proposes his version of Jewish pluralism. He proposes three arguments in support of his pluralist proposal. First, the two mentioned above against exclusivism and inclusivism can be compressed into one: a loving God could not have favorites, and so would choose all people equally. We can begin to see the specter of the Encyclopedic tradition with its assumptions that no particular can be privileged, and no revelation or tradition is to be given special status (except of course itself). Cohn-Sherbok argues that to stress Jewish particularity, in terms of the "chosen people," contradicts the universal love of God. He identifies this central tension as "internally incoherent: if God is truly concerned with the fate of all humanity, he would not have disclosed himself fully and finally to a particular people allowing the rest of humanity to wallow in darkness and ignorance" (157). The God of love revealed in Judaism requires an open tolerance and acceptance of all religions, for such a God would not have confined himself to this one religion in any definitive manner. In this respect, Cohn-Sherbok uses the same argument as Hick when Hick advanced the theistic form of his Copernican revolution.[37]

Cohn-Sherbok's second argument is theological and historical. He suggests that the "sweep of Jewish history thus points to a new goal [pluralism]—a global vision of the universe of faiths in which Judaism is perceived as one among many paths to the Divine." (6, my added bracket) The argument relies on the book's analysis of Jewish history and whether or not it really does "point" in this new direction. In terms of my argument, it would amount to asking the question whether Judaism will be entirely accommodated to liberal modernity, such that many of its central religious beliefs and practices will be radically transformed. Such transformations cannot be ruled out; neither is it possible with any ease to specify what might count as authentic Judaism or not. Certainly at present, many Orthodox Jewish intellectuals and theologians would resist such assimilation.

Finally, Cohn-Sherbok gives two related practical reasons for this shift to Jewish pluralism, the first of which amounts to an ethical requirement and the second which can only be tested retrospectively. The first is that "in contemporary society the Jewish community needs to adopt an even more open stance towards the world religions" (5). Such a need both stems from the internal theological incoherence identified by Cohn-Sherbok within the tradition and also the need to address the world's problems together as a religiously united front.[38] This latter is not unlike Knitter's plea and relates to the second practical reason. According to Cohn-Sherbok, Jews should adopt pluralism because it "paves the way for interfaith encounter on the deepest levels" (24). These levels range from common political action to interfaith prayer.

Having shown how and why Cohn-Sherbok advocates Jewish pluralism, what does this Jewish pluralism look like? The answer is that it looks entirely like Hick's Christian pluralism.[39] This is not because Cohn-Sherbok is unoriginal, but rather because both Hick and Cohn-Sherbok emerge from the same tradition, with the same epistemological, ontological, and ethical assumptions, and have the same goals: the universal acceptance of liberal modernity as the answer to the world's problems. However, there are also some interesting differences as we shall see. But first, let me look a little more closely at the similarities of Hick's and Cohn-Sherbok's pluralism. Cohn-Sherbok adopts wholesale Hick's Kantian-like distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal, so that the divine Real is seen as the ineffable noumenal and the different religions as differing phenomenal responses, none of which can be said to represent the noumenal more

accurately and truthfully, let alone allow for the noumenal's self-revelation within any of the traditions. Cohn-Sherbok writes:

> Following the Kantian distinction between the world-as-it-is (the noumenal world) and the world as perceived (the phenomenal world), the Real *an sich* (in itself) should be distinguished from the Real as conceived in human thought and experience (161).

Like Hick, he suggests that this contrast, which is so crucial to the argument, is to be found in all the different religions. In Judaism, the contrast is between the "*Ayn Sof* as distinct from the *Shekinah* (God's Presence)" (161). While such distinctions are indeed to be found, it is contestable whether they equally imply such a specific form of philosophical agnosticism. However, what interests me here are the ways in which Cohn-Sherbok differs from Hick in working out the implications of this philosophical agnosticism.

The first difference lies in Cohn-Sherbok's recognition of the self-defeating relativistic implications of modernity's ethical liberalism. This is to put the matter polemically and entirely in my own terms, but this is what I believe Cohn-Sherbok's criticism of Hick amounts to. Cohn-Sherbok turns to Hick's essay on the ranking of religions, where Hick asks the question whether it is possible to rank religions as ethically better or worse, more philosophically true or false, or more historically validated or not.[40] Cohn-Sherbok agrees with Hick's argument that one cannot rank religions as a whole for they are "so internally diverse, containing so many different kinds of both good and evil."[41] However, he disagrees with Hick's argument that, even given this problem, one is nevertheless called to grade aspects of different religions. This disagreement is vital, but let me note Hick's argument so as to appreciate Cohn-Sherbok's disagreement. Hick argues that there are four objective and universally attractive and reasonable criteria. The first is one of coherence and internal consistency. The second is that of adequacy: to the particular form of experience on which that religion is based, and to the data of human experience in general. The third is that of promoting salvation and liberation. The fourth is Hick's moral criterion whereby authentic religions exhibit a turning away from the self/ego to a Reality-centeredness, seen in unselfish love and compassion.

I have elsewhere questioned the possibility of such "objective" criteria, but for very different reasons from those given by Cohn-Sherbok's response to Hick. In keeping with the position advanced in this book, I have argued elsewhere, that all criteria are tradition-specific and the more general their expression (hiding their particularity), the less helpful they are to adjudicate in conflicts; and the more specific their expression, the more clearly tradition-specific they are and therefore fail in their job of "impartial" adjudication.[42] Cohn-Sherbok, in contrast, disagrees with Hick, for he seems to recognize that once one cuts one's moorings from the noumenal,

there can be no objective or universally acceptable criteria by which to grade and judge religions. In this recognition, Cohn-Sherbok seems to carry his (and Hick's) pluralism to its logical outcome. I do not want to inspect Cohn-Sherbok's detailed criticisms of Hick's criteria as they are not essential to my argument, but to note simply that they stem from a self-acknowledged relativism as the only strategy to avoid the implicit exclusivism within the strategy of "grading," for Cohn-Sherbok recognizes that grading can only implicitly advance one's own religious presuppositions. I quote Cohn-Sherbok's estimation of Hick's criteria in full:

> These proposals for evaluating religions are ultimately unsatisfactory because they fail to provide clear-cut and generally accepted bases for evaluation. Yet this should not be a surprising conclusion. In the past adherents of a particular religion judged all other religions by the criteria of their own faith; the eclipse of such an Exclusivist stance by a Pluralistic picture of the world's religions inevitably leads to a relativistic conception of the universe of faiths (167).

In so much as Cohn-Sherbok rightly recognizes Hick's exclusivism, he should in principle agree with my argument and analysis of Hick. But he cannot, for this would also call into question his own project. Hence, Cohn-Sherbok tries to steer clear of exclusivism by taking an apparently bold step in openly embracing full-blown relativism as the consequence of the inaccessible noumenal Real. However, even this step fails, for this form of relativism is as exclusivist as any other position, and is far from "open" and "tolerant"—the two virtues Cohn-Sherbok greatly prizes. This is because in Cohn-Sherbok's adopting a Kantian-like framework, following Hick, he also falls foul of the criticism I aimed at Hick's transcendental agnosticism, and indeed Cohn-Sherbok is quite explicit on this count: "in the end the Jewish Pluralist must remain agnostic about the correctness of his own religious convictions" (171).

This has the effect of putting into place some very significant ontological claims, which, despite himself, Cohn-Sherbok is committed to make in judgment *over other* religions precisely because he has adopted this Kantian framework. Most importantly, he claims that the Real cannot be known and no religions can make definitive claims to knowledge of the Real. When they make such claims, these are to be counted as false, as in principle they cannot have epistemological access to the Real, regardless of what they claim or regardless of the arguments they may present for such a claim. The irony located in Hick's position is repeated in Cohn-Sherbok's Jewish Pluralism. It is intolerant toward most forms of orthodox religious belief, be they Jewish, Buddhist, Christian or Muslim. For example, we can see this reductive hermeneutic at work when Cohn-Sherbok proceeds to "demythologize" truth claims within Judaism. Although he does not use the term, he follows Hick's demythologizing strategy very closely in this

regard. This is not surprising as it is a strategy required by the epistemological and ontological assumptions within modernity as noted by Barthes, whether it be called "mythologizing" or otherwise. For example, when speaking of the Jewish understanding of the Godhead (which ironically he uses for his pluralist case viz. the distinction between *Ayn Sof* and the *Shekinah*), Cohn-Sherbok says that this Jewish understanding "cannot be viewed as definitive and final" (168). Regarding the doctrine of the "chosen people," which he acknowledges to be a "central feature of the tradition" (169), Cohn-Sherbok is now willing to dispense with it and, indeed, argues that it needs to be abandoned in so much as it suggests favoritism, parochialism, and self-justification:

> Given that the Real *an sich* transcends human understanding, the conviction that God has selected a particular people as his agent is nothing more than an expression of the Jewish people's sense of superiority and impulse to spread its religious message (169).

Revelation, providence, the doctrine of the Messiah are all accordingly abandoned, as they are within the grand narrative of modernity's recoding of history and "religion." Cohn-Sherbok is quite aware that he will be retranslating not only Judaism, but in his "tolerant" embrace will require fundamental ontological changes in self-understanding from Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism (162-3). For example, he says that we must question the claim that Buddhists make: "that the true understanding of the human condition is presented in the teachings of Gautama Buddha" (163). Or, to take another example, we must abandon the outmoded Christian claim that "Jesus Christ was God himself, the second person of the Trinity in human form" (163). From the pluralist perspective, "neither Jew, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, nor Buddhist has any justification for believing that his respective tradition embodies the uniquely true and superior religious path" (163).[43] Hence, Cohn-Sherbok here inevitably breaks his embargo on making judgments regarding truth in other religions, despite his criticism of Hick for making just such judgments. This should be of no surprise: this is the logical consequence and fate of pluralists, for they are finally no different from religious exclusivists, except in their differing tradition-specific starting point—modernity.

Finally, in openly embracing "a relativistic conception of the universe of faiths" such that it is just not possible to judge truth claims (167), Cohn-Sherbok invokes two further problems. First, there are no valid grounds by which his own position could commend itself. This is the age-old problem whereby relativizers relativize themselves and subsequently have no grounds upon which to commend their position to those who disagree. Hence, it is a curious argument when Cohn-Sherbok suggests that since we cannot make any judgments concerning truth, we should abandon any claims to "religious superiority" (by which he means a truth that may call into question other positions), and suggests that "instead the adherents of all faiths should regard one another with respect, acknowledging the spiritual validity of one another's traditions" (167). Since he has removed grounds for making judgments regarding the invalidity of a religion, likewise he has removed grounds for affirming their validity. At this point, Hick's thesis fares better, for at least it refuses an utter relativism, invoking instead a religious argument against all forms of naturalism.[44] Cohn-Sherbok is unable to do even this. It is a curious clarion call from someone holding a position that openly acknowledges that final and definitive claims made by traditional religions are "misapprehensions" (163), to now argue that no such negative judgments should be made in regard to the claims made by such religions. Cohn-Sherbok's attempt to avoid Hick's exclusivism has led him into this type of unintended self-contradiction.

HICK'S DEFENSE OF "PLURALISM"

I will now finally turn to John Hick's response to the argument that I have developed in this chapter. Hick makes two responses to my argument. The first is that if all I am saying is that everyone holds some form of truth criteria and that this constitutes an exclusivism of sorts, "although intelligible in a purely notional and trivial sense," such an observation "is much more misleading than helpful."[45] He argues that it is better to keep the terms exclusivism and pluralism as they are "naturally" descriptive of the positions staked out. Hence, by keeping these terms, important distinctions are kept intact, for claiming that one's own religion is the only "true" religion, for which "exclusivism" is surely the natural descriptive term and, on the other hand, the idea that there is a plurality of "true" religions, for which "pluralism" is surely the natural descriptive term requires the retention of such labels and that their logical difference be acknowledged.[46]

His second argument is to counter my claim that pluralism operates with the same logical structure as exclusivism. Hick argues that:

> religious exclusivism and religious pluralism are of different logical kinds, the one being a self-committing affirmation of faith and the other a philosophical hypothesis. The hypothesis is offered as the best available explanation . . . of the data of the history of religions. Pluralism is thus not another historical religion making an exclusive claim, but a meta-theory about the relation between the historical religions.[47]

The difficulty of Hick's reply lies in his telling resort to alleged naturally descriptive terms. We saw this same strategy in Knitter, who evokes a kind of positivist self-revealing truthfulness in relation to his own hypothesis—a point that Roland Barthes notes is a typical rhetorical form of argument

employed by modernity. In Hick's response, I would contend, there is both a profound misdescription as well as a tacit claiming of high ground which obscures the debate and the real issues at stake. Let me elaborate with four interconnected points in response to Hick.

First, logically speaking, if those who claim that theirs is the only true religious tradition should be naturally described as exclusivist, it is not clear to me why "pluralists" who also believe that theirs is the only true tradition should not equally be naturally described as exclusivists. It is hardly a true description of pluralism, as found in Hick, that his explanation (or "hypothesis") is the best fit, the most "naturally" accurate interpretation of the "data of the history of religions," for as we have seen, the schema into which the religions are fitted undermines the self-understanding of most of the religions concerned. The outcome is that all religions are seen to make "mythological" (or false) claims, except for pluralists who possess a non-mythological set of ontological assumptions to sustain their own tradition (liberal modernity). As I have shown, such a position has the effect of claiming that there are no true religions, for all misunderstand themselves until they embrace the pluralist hypothesis. They must fundamentally reinterpret their self-understanding in modernity's terms. Thus it can still be argued that pluralists should be called exclusivists.

Second, Hick's distinction between a "self-committing affirmation of faith" and a "philosophical hypothesis" is highly questionable, for every hypothesis, the terms in which it is framed, and the assumptions regarding the modes of its testing and viability are tradition-specific. And, as MacIntyre and Milbank are at pains to show, in differing ways, every tradition requires an element of "self-committing faith," for there are no traditions or positions that are self-evident or neutral, and no enquiries that approach "raw data" neutrally and then explain them from some objective standpoint. Hence, in response to Hick, it might be argued that his Kantian presuppositions do not generate a neutral hypothesis, a "meta-theory about the relation between historical religions" as he claims, but are in fact "first-order" creedal statements of a philosophical faith with many epistemological, ontological, and ethical presuppositions undergirding it.[48] Hick reserves this latter category of "first-order" claims for those with religious faith. But part of my argument is to show that pluralists come from a (hidden) faith position, full of first-order truth claims which exclude truth claims other than their own.

Third, while Hick claims his position does not arise from a historical religion, I would suggest that it emerges from something very akin to this: liberal modernity, or in MacIntyre's terms, the Encyclopedic tradition. In this sense, Hick's pluralism is a historical "religion," in a formal sense, in so much as it has members who share common philosophical presuppositions (Kantian), and believe in certain forms of common practice (liberalism), and are strongly committed to a universal mission regarding their new faith. They usually belong to and support organizations that advance their common project and have rituals and ceremonies to sustain their sectarianism. That this is not so easily noticeable is simply because liberal modernity is the prevailing *mythos*, as MacIntyre and Milbank have shown.

Fourth, even if one were to reject arguments two and three above, argument one alone would make it difficult to see how Hick could commend pluralism as the "least problem-prone, explanation of the data."[49] It seems to fail to explain the data at all, as it refuses to accept the data on the terms of those that generate it. In one sense, the traditional "exclusivist" (in Hick's terms) fares better (on Hick's criteria), for he or she at least is faithful to the self-description of *one* of the religions (their own), rather than undermining all the religion's self-descriptions. On this point, dialectically, exclusivistsemerge as winners of this debate showing that pluralists fail to solve their own problem, but more so, that exclusivism solves it better.

I have tried to show that when Cohn-Sherbok's pluralism is similar to Hick's, it fails for it finally belongs to the exclusivist Encyclopedic tradition. In so much as Cohn-Sherbok differs from Hick, he simply indicates the trajectory in which the tradition finally ends up—as MacIntyre was at pains to point out. Whatever, these types of Kantian modernity seem incapable of positively engaging with difference and Otherness, be they re-presented in Christian or Jewish forms. If the effect of liberal modernity has been pervasive in western circles, and thereby deeply and corrosively affected Christian and Jewish theology, in the next two chapters we turn east, to examine the extent of modernity's influence upon a Hindu pluralist and a Buddhist pluralist. This move to the east is for four reasons. First, it is an extension of my exploration of the extent of modernity's pervasive influence: does its "god" appear in other religious traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism? Second, it allows me to develop my argument that pluralism is deeply problematic, for it is finally no different from exclusivism. Third, it will allow me to explore non-Enlightenment forms of "pluralism" and also pursue my earlier argument that inclusivism is best seen as a form of exclusivism. Fourth, in the debate between religions where openness and tolerance are supposedly the highest goals, I suggest that Christian and other forms of "pluralism" fail to deliver on their own stated aims, and that finally, a trinitarian approach actually attains pluralist goals in taking difference and otherness utterly seriously. Trinitarian exclusivism can acknowledge God's action within other traditions, without domesticating or obliterating their alterity, such that real conversation and engagement might occur. This theological argument will be resumed in chapter four.

Notes

1. SCM, London, 1983; 2nd ed., 1994.

2. See for example, Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1985; Paul J. Griffiths, ed., *Christianity through Non-*

Christian Eyes, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1990; John Hick and Hasan Askari, eds., *Religious Diversity*, Gower, Aldershot, 1985.

3. See the declarations in H. Lindsell, ed., *The Church's Worldwide Mission: Proceedings of the Congress on the Church's Worldwide Mission*, World Books, Waco, Texas, 1966.

4. See the interesting comparison of these two by K. Randall Schmitt, *Death and After Life in the Theologies of Karl Barth and John Hick*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1986. Hick constantly uses the questionable argument against exclusivists that they automatically "consign non-believers to perdition." See for example, John Hick, "The Possibility of Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin D'Costa," *Religious Studies*, 33, 1997, 161-6.

5. He began, in his own words, as a "strongly evangelical and indeed fundamentalist" Christian: see *God Has Many Names*, Macmillan, London, 1980, 2. See also my tracing of his entire pilgrimage in *John Hick's Theology of Religions*, University Press of America, London/New York, 1987, 1-16.

6. John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, Fount/Collins, London, 1977, 131.

7. Hick, *God and the Universe*, 166-7. See Gerard Loughlin's penetrating remarks in "Myths, Signs and Significations," *Theology*, 730, 1986, 268-75.

8. Hick, *God and the Universe*, 172, 177.

9. This Kantian epistemology is developed in Hick's first published book, *Faith and Knowledge*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1957. See such critics as Philip Barnes, "Continuity and Development in John Hick's Theology," *Studies in Religion*, 21, 4, 1992, 395-402; and Christopher Sinkinson, *The Nature of Christian Apologetics in Response to Religious Pluralism: An Analysis of the Contribution of John Hick*, University of Bristol, Ph.D., 1997.

10. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Paladin, London, 1983, 154. I am indebted to Gerard Loughlin for drawing my attention to the possible use of Barthes in this way. See his "Prefacing Pluralism: John Hick and the Mastery of Religion," *Modern Theology*, 7, 1990, 29-55. (Subsequent page references to *Mythologies* in the main body of the text.)

11. See also the incisive comments on this point by Joe DiNoia, "Pluralist Theology of Religions: Pluralistic or Non-Pluralistic?" in Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1990, 119-34.

12. See for instance, John Milbank, "The End of Dialogue"; and Kenneth Surin, "A Certain 'Politics of Speech': Toward an Understanding of the Relationships Between the Religions in the Age of the McDonald's Hamburger," in D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness*, 174-91; and 192-212 respectively; and Loughlin, "Prefacing."

13. In this respect I agree that Cardinal Ratzinger's analysis of Knitter and Hick as Kantian relativists is correct, although he oddly attributes the turn to orthopraxis in Knitter's work as primarily influenced by Indian religions (38), rather than being the further outworking of modernity coupled with Marxism. See Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Central Problem for Faith," *Briefing*, Vol 27, 1, 1997, 36-42. For a more incisive historical estimation of the genesis of liberation theology's orthopraxis, see John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, ch. 8. Ratzinger's estimation here is not in keeping with his analysis elsewhere when discussing liberation theology or Tissa Balasuriya's praxis solution.

14. It is instructive to see a deeply critical Muslim and Hindu response to Hans Küng's similar call for a "global" ethics. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Veena Das in "Special Issue: proceedings of the first meeting of the Harvard Divinity School's Jerome Hall Dialogue Series," *The Muslim World*, LXVII, 2, 1987, 96-105, 109, 116-36.

15. Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1995; and Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1996, respectively.

16. See the co-authored volume by Knitter, John Cobb, Jr., Len Swidler, and Monika Hellwig, *Death or Dialogue*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1990: 20, for his critique of common essences, and 26, where he argues that this is Hick's position. See also "Dialogue and Liberation," *Drew Gateway*, 58, 1, 1987, 1-53. I do not think there is any real difference between Hick and Knitter on substantial issues, but rather a difference in emphasis. See my "Christian Theology of Religions: An Evaluation of John Hick and Paul Knitter," *Studia Missionalia*, 42, 1993, 161-78; and the excellent essays by John Milbank and Kenneth Surin in Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1990, 174-91, and 192-212 respectively.

17. Knitter constantly tries to respond to postmodernist concerns regarding the danger of essentializing: "What I am saying, then, is not that there is a common essence or a common religious experience or even a precisely defined common goal within all religions" (1:56). He writes the above sentence directly under the heading: "the common human experience of suffering"—which seems to suggest that religious experience is some overlay to human experience. And then soon after, he writes, "If with David Tracy and Schubert Ogden we want to talk about a "common human experience" to which all religions can respond in order to understand themselves and others, then it is the experience of suffering and the dangers that it brings forth" (1:57). This sense of an unmediated experience, a universal foundational platform, is more explicit when he suggests of suffering, its "*universality* . . . the fact that it is found everywhere in similar forms and with similar causes—but also because of its *immediacy* to our experience" (1:89). This is a baffling claim which entirely ignores anthropological work that has deeply called such alleged similarities into question. See Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, Routledge, London, 1990, esp. 141-76. Knitter then comes clean: "I want to express this claim as cautiously as possible, but I do not want to equivocate. Suffering has a universality and immediacy that makes it the most suitable, and necessary, site for establishing common ground for interreligious dialogue" (1:89). There is an irony that when Knitter quotes Francis Schüssler Fiorenza regarding suffering: "Although it is not without interpretation and one's horizon deeply affects one's suffering, our bodily existence is affected in such a way that gives suffering a '*mediated* immediacy' " (1:89, my emphasis, quoting Schüssler Fiorenza, "Theological and Religious Studies: The Contest of the Faculties," in Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley, eds., *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*, Westminster, Louisville, 1991, 135), Knitter immediately writes: "And this immediacy is available to all cultures and all religions." Schüssler Fiorenza's more cautious and correct acknowledgment of "mediated" experience has been dropped.

18. Citations referred to by Knitter: "An Earth Charter" prepared by the International Coordinating Committee on Religion and the Earth for the Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro, June 1992; T. Berry & B. Swimme, *The Universe Story*, Harper, San Francisco, 1992.

19. John Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1997, 258. Ratzinger makes the same point regarding the "New

Age," ibid, 39-40. For an excellent analysis of the "New Age" in sharper terms, see Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1996.

20. See, for example, Julius Lipner, "The Christian and Vedântic theories of originative causality: a study in transcendence and immanence," *Philosophy East and West*, 28, 1, 1978, 53-68.

21. For two interesting alternative emphases on creation: see Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *"In the Beginning . . ." A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, W. B. Eerdmans, Michigan, 1990, esp. 79-100; and Milbank, *The Word*, ch. 5.

22. See Milbank, *Theology*, ch. 8, and *The Word*, ch. 12; and Stanley Hauerwas, "Some Theological Reflections on Gutierrez's Use of 'Liberation' as a Theological Concept," *Modern Theology*, 3, 1, 1986, 67-76; and the excellent use of Hauerwas to engage critically with Moltmann's version of European liberation/political theology by Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis*, Lund University Press, Sweden, 1994.

23. There is a constant ambivalence on this point in Knitter's work, see 88-93, especially highlighted when he writes that after the resurrection "The proclaimer became the proclaimed. Jesus' own Kingdom-centeredness became the early community's Christ-centeredness" (92). This view reflects accurately Pope John Paul II's view that Knitter criticizes later (127-35). However, Knitter shifts away from this position, implying that the post-resurrection preaching needs correction with pre-resurrection truth (if such a distinction is even admissible): "Being centered on Christ is the Christian way of being centered on the kingdom. As Jesus would remind us: it is more important to focus on the Kingdom than to focus on him" (92). These kinds of argument are generated from within modernity and make two strategies possible: one can identify the more primal original historical Jesus who will cut through the cultic overlay which the church imposed on him; and one can identify the values and program he taught (the social gospel) which, in principle, can be detached from him.

24. Immanuel Kant, *Religion with the Limits of Reason Alone*, Harper & Row, New York, 1960, 72-103.

25. Of course, such bridal imagery is present in the bible, but Knitter fails to explore sufficiently the accusations of infidelity made against God's own chosen people in their relations with other gods: see, for instance, Hos 1:2.

26. Citing Schubert Ogden, "Some Thoughts on a Christian Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," *Criterion*, 11, 1994, 5-10.

27. In claiming this, I do not intend to identify the kingdom and church exclusively. See Gavin D'Costa, "The Kingdom and a Trinitarian Ecclesiology: An Analysis of Soteriocentrism," in Paul Mojzes and Leonard Swidler, eds., *Christian Mission and Interreligious Dialogue*, Edwin Mellen Press, New York, 1990, 51-61.

28. See *Dei Verbum* 2, 4, and 11.

29. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1965, 49, my emphasis. Rahner goes on to argue that what is contained "virtually" in Christ, both logically and "through the luminous power of the Spirit" (53), "can and must still be called 'Revelation' " (59), rather than inferred human propositions. I agree, although Rahner tends to focus too strongly on the propositional aspect of revelation in this early essay, rather than on the primary personal, historical, and relational features of revelation which would more fully support his

argument for the development of dogma. See also Edward Schillebeeckx's less propositionally oriented discussion in *Revelation and Theology*, Vol. 1, Sheed & Ward, London, 1967, 13-20. Denzinger 2020 is reiterated in *Dei Verbum* 2, 4.

30. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1, 49.

31. I tested a brief form of this argument in Gavin D'Costa, "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions," *Religious Studies*, 32, 1996, 223-32; and John Hick's reply: "The Possibility of Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin D'Costa," *Religious Studies*, 33, 1997, 161-6.

32. I shall mainly use, *Judaism and Other Faiths*, Macmillan, London, 1994; but also refer to *Issues in Contemporary Judaism*, Macmillan, London, 1991, chs. 11 & 12 which is substantially reproduced in *Other Faiths; The Future of Judaism*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1994, esp. ch. 7; *Modern Judaism*, Macmillan, London, 1996, esp. ch. 9. Louis Jacobs (see note 36 below) sometimes seems to veer into a pluralist position. However, see the Jewish pluralists Harold Kasimow and David M. Gordis in Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow, eds., *John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1999, 1-26, and 125-38, respectively. See Norman Solomon's, *Judaism and World Religion*, Macmillan, London, 1991, for an alternative "Orthodox inclusivist" overview on the matter.

33. For a classic account of exclusive Jewish-Christian pluralism, see Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William B. Hallo, Routledge, Kegan & Paul, London, 1971; and Abraham Joshua Heschel, "No Religion is an Island," in Paul J. Griffiths, ed., *Christianity through Non-Christian Eyes*, Orbis, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1990, 26-40. Both Solomon, *Judaism*, and Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism*, do not find any pluralists within their surveys of Judaism.

34. See especially, *Modern Judaism*, and his critique of contemporary Jewish traditions.

35. Strictly speaking, it is extremely difficult to find any such Jewish exclusivists, rather than Cohn-Sherbok's claimed many (21). Cohn-Sherbok's cites hardly any examples. The Noachite covenant and the notion of the "righteous gentiles" usually blocks off such a route.

36. For examples of Jewish "inclusivists," see David Hartman, *Conflicting Visions: Spiritual Possibilities of Modern Israel*, Schocken Books, New York, 1990; Norman Solomon, *Judaism*; Louis Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1973.

37. See Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, Collins/Fount, London, 1977, 122.

38. See *Modern Judaism*, 217.

39. Cohn-Sherbok uses Hick's *God and the Universe of Faiths*, London, 1977; *God Has Many Names*, Macmillan, London, 1980; *Problems in Religious Pluralism*, Macmillan, London, 1985; and "On Grading Religions," *Religious Studies*, 17, 4, 1981, 451-67.

40. Hick, "On Grading." There is a slightly more elaborate treatment of Hick's criteria in Cohn-Sherbok, *Issues*, 139-44, but with the same conclusion—see 144.

41. Hick, "On Grading," 451.

42. Gavin D'Costa, "Whose Objectivity? Which Neutrality? The Doomed Quest for a Neutral Vantage Point from Which to Judge Religions," *Religious Studies*, 29, 1993, 79-95.

43. One might ask whether "superior" has any logical function in this sentence, as something that is "unique" exists in a class of its own and in this sense cannot be compared to other paths.

44. Hick, "Reply," 163.
45. Hick, "Reply," 162.
46. Hick, "Reply," 162-63.
47. Hick, "Reply," 163.
48. Hick, "Reply," 163.
49. Hick, "Reply," 165.