

Isolation: Disconnection, solitude and seclusion in a connected world

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Enemy at the Gate?

Models of Response to Contemporary Religious Plurality

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Abstract

Ours is age of plurality in all things. Yet, plurality has always been the case: difference, diversity, multiplicity – that which tends to disconnectedness in whatever sphere of human life – has ever been the lot of humanity. Religion is no exception. Yet while most religions would hold that unity – the uniformity and coherence suggestive of an inherent connectedness – is a *sine qua non*, the lived reality of religious people everywhere is often the context of, and contention with, a disconnectedness which is consequent upon difference of viewpoint, variety of experience, clash of interpretation, and competing claims for religious allegiance and identity. This can be the case both within any one major religious tradition as well as between them.

Given the ubiquitous nature of religion and the pressing need for improved interreligious relations in many parts of the world, the question of how the fact of religious plurality is apprehended from within the religions themselves is critical. Naturally every religion proffers its own hermeneutic of the religiously ‘other’. Typically, this has included variations on the themes of exclusivity and inclusiveness. More recently the paradigm of pluralism has been advocated as a positive hermeneutic accounting for the fact of religious plurality. In this paper I shall engage in a brief analytical discussion of exclusivism and inclusivism as models of rejection and incorporation, and then examine models of the affirmation of religious plurality by way of the multiple paradigms of pluralism.

Introduction

In 1529 the Muslim armies of the Turkish Ottoman Empire were besieging the ancient city of Vienna: the enemy was at the gate. And with Vienna being a southern European gateway, there was a real sense that the then Islamic enemy was indeed attempting to storm the gate of Europe. Of course, in an era when civilisation was by and large identified with the city-state, or at least bounded, fortified, gated cities, the phenomenon of the enemy being at the gate was by no means an unusual one. Nowadays we don't live in fortified cities and, attempts at maintaining the integrity of national borders notwithstanding, for the most part geographic boundaries demarcating community identities are quite porous. In a globalised post-modern age of mass travel, mass communication, and the breakdown of homogeneity in favour of increasing diversity in almost all things, the notion that there is some kind of "gate" at which an enemy might stand is all but meaningless. But not totally; targeting the Twin Towers was the dramatic 21st century equivalent of the medieval storming of the gates: the great secular city was unable to repel the invader; but neither was it overrun. Attacks on embassies, the bombing of transport infrastructure, the targeting of locales of commerce and communal congregating, are the contemporary equivalents of an enemy assaulting the gate. A sense of siege by, once again, an Islamic enemy would seem for contemporary western society to be a mark of our age.

Today's obvious gateways are international sea- and airports; and all must pass through the electronic eye of the needle. At least one nation manifests its sense of being under siege in very overt ways. And across America, as well as in many other countries, the phenomenon of gated communities – offering some sense of protected space against the encroachments of a hostile world – are on the rise. In some cases, such gated communities are of a religious ilk: new Christian 'Viennas' holding the line against an ungodly world. Yet we live in a time when great barriers of the past – apartheid, the Berlin Wall, the Iron Curtain – have crumbled in the face of a relentless drive to overcome isolating divisions. But the embrace of isolation has not waned, only shifted focus. Withdrawal into laagers of security and the containment of a perceived enemy

behind walls of demarcation constitute new and rising phenomena. The embrace of isolation calls forth bigger military budgets; it demands tighter border controls; it turns the mat of welcome into a barrier of suspicion. And although today, as with Vienna in 1529, the threatening enemy is identified as Islamic, it is not Islam – or Muslim people *per se* – which is the adversary.

The real problem with which we are all confronted, whether we realise it or not, is the perennial – but now urgently pressing – problem of contending with inter-communal diversity as such. The real enemy at the gate is the fact of an unresolved contending with pluralities of otherness. In particular, it is the plurality of religious identity which, even more than ethnic diversity, is arguably the key issue. Religious plurality is often the primary factor underlying internal social and inter-communal tension. The truly religious terrorist of our time is the one who implacably rejects the pluralist milieu in favour of imposing a narrow conformity. So how religious communities within a given society contend with the fact of existing within a plurality of alternate religious communities is crucial. After all, it is a *sine qua non* of the secular liberal society that the mutual tolerance of religious – and other – differentiations is presupposed. An allied assumption is that religious groups within such a society endorse the secular value of mutual tolerance. But the reality may not be so simple. So how do – and how may – religious communities contend with religious alterity? Every religion has its own interpretation of the religiously ‘other’ which, until relatively recently, amounted to variations on the themes of exclusivity and inclusiveness. Nowadays the paradigm of pluralism has been advocated as a positive response to the fact of religious plurality. My intention is to give a brief analysis of exclusivism and inclusivism as models of rejection and incorporation of plurality, then examine some models of the affirmation of religious plurality. A close analysis shows, however, that exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism do not denote three discrete paradigms but that each refers, in fact, to a range of sub-paradigms.¹

¹ See Douglas Pratt, ‘Religious Plurality, Referential Realism and Paradigms of Pluralism’ in Avery Plaw, ed., *Frontiers of Diversity: Explorations in Contemporary Pluralism*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2005, 191-209; – ‘Universalising Rhetoric and Particularist Identities: Pluralism and the Future of Our Religious Pasts’. *International Journal in the Humanities*, Vol. 1, 2003/2004, 1347-1356.

Exclusivism: *Paradigms of Rejection*

Recent analytical work, in the context of contemporary religiously-driven terrorism, shows the presence of a distinctive and rigid form of exclusivity – of actively rejecting that which does not conform – being inherent to religious fundamentalism.² This rise in the phenomenon of religious exclusivity – of advocating a form of isolation – can be understood as a variant of the paradigm of exclusivism. So what, then, is the paradigm? The paradigm of exclusivism amounts to *the material identification of a particular religion (or form of that religion) with the essence and substance of true universal religion as such*, thereby excluding all other possibilities to that claim. From this viewpoint, the exclusivist's religion is the '*Only Right One*'. By its very nature exclusivism is hostile to dialogue proper, but it nevertheless impinges on dialogue, most often contributing to the undermining of efforts toward it.

The exclusivist affirms identity in a complex world of plurality by a return to the firm foundations of his or her own tradition and an emphasis on the distinctive identity provided by that tradition....Exclusivism is more than simply a conviction about the transformative power of the particular vision one has; it is a conviction about its finality and its absolute priority over competing views.³

For the exclusivist the mere co-existence of religions is not possible – the natural tendency to an exclusive self-assertion predominates.⁴

I suggest the paradigm of exclusivism comes in three variants: *open*, *closed*, and *extreme* or 'hard-line rejectionist'. By its very nature exclusivism *per se* is hostile to any form of interreligious dialogue or rapport, yet it nevertheless impinges on interfaith relations, most often contributing to outright resistance, or at least the undermining of efforts to engage in any form of open relationship. Exclusivism varyingly rejects or devalues the

² Douglas Pratt, 'Religious Fundamentalism: A Paradigm for Terrorism?' in Rachel Barrowman, ed., *International Terrorism: New Zealand Perspectives*. Wellington: Institute of Policy Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, 2005, 31-52.

³ Diana L. Eck. *Encountering God. A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banares*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993, 174.

⁴ Cf. Raymond Panikkar. 'The Unknown Christ of Hinduism' in John Hick & Brian Hebblethwaite, eds, *Christianity and Other Religions*, London: Collins, 1980, 122-150.

‘other’ as other. But there are nuanced variations of the application of the exclusivist paradigm which can be identified.

1. An *open exclusivism*, while maintaining cognitive and salvific superiority, may at least be amenable disposed toward the other, if only to allow for – even encourage – the capitulation (by way of conversion, for example) of the other. Open exclusivism implies openness to some form of relationship with another without expectation of, or openness to, consequential or reciprocal change of self-identity with respect to that relationship. An ‘open’ exclusivism may yet entertain a ‘dialogue’ of sorts – perhaps a conversational interaction – if only with a view to understanding the perspective of the other in order, then, better to refute it and so proclaim the ‘Only Right One’ religion.

2. In contrast to open exclusivism, *closed exclusivism* simply dismisses the ‘other’ out of hand. Relationship to the ‘other’, especially any religious other, is effectively ruled out. The ‘other’ may be acknowledged as having its rightful place, but that place is inherently inferior to that of the closed exclusivist who, *inter alia*, prefers to remain wholly apart from the other. A ‘closed’ exclusivism will spurn interaction with another religious viewpoint altogether: imperialist assertion is the only mode of communication admissible.

3. The third variant is that of *extreme exclusivism* which marks a shift from the closed form understood more simply as the exercise of a right to withdraw into itself, as it were. Extreme exclusivism gives expression to hard-line rejectionist exclusivity, the viewpoint that asserts an exclusive identity to the extent that the fact and presence of an ‘other’ is actively resisted, even to the point of taking steps to eliminate the other. The distinguishing feature denoting extreme exclusivism is the negative valorising of the ‘other’ – howsoever defined – with concomitant harsh sanctions and limitations imposed upon the other. It is this level of exclusive religion which, in its hostility to ‘otherness’, inherently invalidates variety. It is this level, or version, of religious exclusivism which lies at the heart of so much religious strife – not to mention terrorism and insurgency –

and thus poses an acute challenge to those who would advocate religious freedoms, toleration, and peaceful co-existence.

Inclusivism: *Paradigms of Incorporation*

In general terms I define religious inclusivism as the *effective identity of a particular religion with the universal, with some allowance made for others*. This paradigm suggests the ‘other’ is included surreptitiously, by being understood as already ‘anonymously’ and indirectly within the fold of ‘true religion’ identified, of course, as being the religion of the proponent – the *Only Fully Right One*. Within Christianity it has been embraced formally by the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II, and it reflects most official contemporary Protestant Church positions. However, inclusivism, I suggest, comes in at least three variant forms, or at least it displays three variant perspectives of expression and self-understanding which I call *Gatekeeper*, *Incognito Ubiquity*, and *Imperialist Inclusivism*.

1. ***Gatekeeper Inclusivism*** allows for limited particular/universal connections in respect of other religions, but the validity of such connections is found only through one religion – ‘mine’ – as being the point of entrance into the realm of the ‘Fully Right Religion’. A measure of generosity of heart can be extended inasmuch as the religiously other is perceived as not completely beyond the pale: other religions may be said to enjoy a measure of veracity, or limited representation, of the Universal Truth. However, even these religions must, in some sense, go through the ‘gate’ of the inclusive religion to obtain full religious or salvific validity. But the governing context is clear and unequivocal. The religion of the inclusivist is the *only fully right way* to salvation; the *only valid bearer* of religious truth as such. It constitutes the gatekeeper wherein, at best, others may be admitted to the pen.

2. By way of contrast, what may be termed ***Incognito Ubiquity Inclusivism*** allows for partial validity (i.e., truth value) as well as partial efficacy (i.e., salvific value) in respect of other religions. This is more than a matter of gate-keeping with a generous heart. There is a hint of pluralism inasmuch as some theological value is accorded to other

religions, but there is no doubt as to how that is contextualised: others are viewed as variant and limited expressions of the universal or religious truth that is yet *best expressed* by our *Right One*. The ‘our’, of course, is important: any religion could theoretically, if not actually, take this view. Each can view itself as possessing in full that which others lack or have but partially.

3. The third variant, ***Imperialist Inclusivism***, allows for the partial truth validity and salvific efficacy in respect of others (but only those deemed ‘authentic’ religions; all else is effectively excluded) in that such others are viewed as either legitimate variant out-workings, or distorted yet valid versions, of the *only comprehensive Right One*. That is to say, as a sort of advance over the notion that other religions, in some incognito fashion, express in part what the inclusive religion has in full, there is in this variant of inclusivism an allowance that certain other religions may, indeed, be living out, in an authentic way, that which is nevertheless to be found fully in the one comprehensively true or right religion. Other religions, at least under certain conditions, are already and ‘anonymously’ included within the worldview framework of the dominant religion in this schema. They enjoy a partial measure of being right, relative to that religion which is, of course, fully right. In the end the generic inclusivist stance highlights the basic assumption inherited from the exclusivist stance: the total identification of a universal value, such as religious truth or salvation, with the particulars of but one religion.

Pluralism: *Paradigms of Plurality Affirmation*

Pluralism, broadly speaking, is the stance that embraces the fact of plurality and gives it a positive interpretation with a self-reflexive edge. Significantly, pluralism not only affirms plurality, it also asserts that any unitary or singular identity within the plural mix needs to view itself as, indeed, a *part of* that mix, not as something which contrasts with it, or stands diametrically opposed to it. Any unitary identity, of whatever sort, is to be conceived as located necessarily within a pluralist context, and so its very conceptuality must take account of that context. This is the situation for Christian denominational identity within the context of ecumenism, for example. At the very least the hermeneutic of pluralism signals an equalising of value and cognitive status across the substantive

plurality. It does not require the abandonment of distinctiveness and uniqueness of particulars within that plurality; it does require openness to relativity and relationality, including openness to interactive responsiveness, as fundamental components of identity and being of singular items within the plural mix.

The essential idea of pluralism, as an ideological or hermeneutical response to the fact of plurality, is to posit a *multiplicity of particular expressions of that which is deemed to be universal*, in opposition to the idea that there can only be but one valid or fully valid expression of the universal. This means that different religions are equally valid expressions of some universal ‘religious reality’. Specific religions are co-equally valid expressions of some universal notion of ‘true religion’. Thus both difference and equality are affirmed. Religions are not all the ‘same’ – their differences are important; yet religions are no better or worse than each other as equally valid expressions of the Universal. On this basis, no one religion can lay claim to an objective superiority, or superlative congruence with the universal religious reality, in respect to other religions. I suggest there are a number of discrete paradigms of pluralism. Some are more obvious and well known; others are somewhat novel.⁵ I place them within three sub-set categories.

I. Common-point Resolution Pluralism

This standard definitional paradigm resolves the problematic of diversity by recourse to the idea of singular reference point lying at either the beginning or the end of the trajectory of religions. The concepts of *Common Ground* and *Common Goal* pluralism are often assumed to be the substance of religious pluralism as such. They constitute the default position that is most often discussed and the basis upon which religious pluralism, as an ideological response to plurality, is most often criticized. Let us look at them in turn. *Common Ground Pluralism*, views religious differences, or the variety of religions, as *Contextualised Variable Expressions of/from a Universal Source*: the fundamental idea is clear – there is a ‘common ground’ of religious ‘reality’ from which the different

⁵ Douglas Pratt, ‘Pluralism and Interreligious Engagement: The Contexts of Dialogue’. In David Thomas with Clare Amos, eds., *A Faithful Presence, essays for Kenneth Cragg*, London: Melisende Press, 2003, 402-418. See also: Douglas Pratt, ‘Contextual Paradigms for Interfaith Relations’. *Current Dialogue*, No 42, December 2003, 3-9

religions of the world derive. John Hick, a leading representative of this view, argues that since the middle of the twentieth century a new consciousness of human existence set in one world with many world religions has arisen. New conditions and contexts demand new thinking. If our neighbour is someone with whom one can engage in conversation and dialogue and, in so engaging, make discoveries about the relativity of values in respect of religious identities, then, Hick asks, are members of one religion, Christianity for example, demonstrably any better (morally or behaviourally) than members of other religions? He draws the conclusion that “it is not possible to establish the unique moral superiority of any one of the great world faiths”.⁶ All religions contain examples of great good and of great evil. Says Hick: “We need to compare apples with apples”. Hick’s approach is essentially one of reconciling the aspectival relativism that embraces complementary diversity. The variant expressions of divine reality contained within the different religions are not necessarily or automatically mutually exclusive, but rather necessarily limited, yet complementary, images or manifestations of the divine Reality “each expressing some aspect or range of aspects and yet none by itself fully and exhaustively corresponding to the infinite nature of the ultimate reality”.⁷

The second variant within the standard paradigm of pluralism, closely allied to the first, is *Common Goal Pluralism* which holds that religious differences reflect the *Variety of Salvific Paths leading, or drawn to, the Universal Goal*. On this view the key idea is that there is a transformative goal that is the end-point of all religions, even though it may be differently expressed (in concert with the narrative tradition within which each religion dwells uniquely) and differently attained (again in keeping with the unique transformative or salvific narrative of each religion). As Hick remarks, “different religions have their different names for God acting savingly towards mankind”.⁸ Hick further suggests that the variant salvific paths of religion indicate that religions themselves may be regarded as

⁶ John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths*, London: SCM Press, 1995, 15.

⁷ John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, London: SCM Press, 1993, 140.

⁸ John Hick, *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London: SCM Press, 1977, 181.

different manifestations to humanity of a yet more ultimate ground of all salvific transformation. ... the possibility that an infinite transcendent reality is being differently conceived, and therefore differently experienced, and therefore differently responded to from within our several religio-cultural ways of being human.⁹

Ground and goal, though complementarily linked, are nevertheless two variant paradigms of the pluralist hypothesis forming the ‘standard’ paradigmatic subset. The fundamental ideas are clear – there is a ‘common ground’ of religious ‘reality’ from which the different religions of the world derive; or a transformative ‘goal’ that is the end-point of all religions, even though it may be differing expressed and differently attained.

II. *Incommensurable Pluralism*

The second paradigm set expresses the view that there is, in fact no point of commensurability between religions; essential differences count decisively against any significant point of commonality. This paradigm consists of an extreme definition of pluralism. ***Radically Differentiated Plurality*** holds that religious differences signal *Irreconcilable Differentiation of Religious Identities*. That is to say, there is no reasonable ground to assume a link across religions: their individual, or particular, identities militate against any such linkage as inferred by the predominant standard paradigm-set of pluralism. What are conveniently called religions cannot be said to be variant examples of any single category in the first place. The difference between them is of such a nature that, strictly speaking, it is illicit even to consider that there is any point of meaningful conceptual contact among the religions. The leading exponent of this variant is the American theologian and philosopher John Cobb.¹⁰ He may be identified as a “pure pluralist” for whom religions are not mere variant expressions of the one divine reality, but are genuinely plural in respect of the realities they represent. Thus, for example, the outcome of dialogical encounter may well be mutual transformation as opposed to mutual

⁹ Hick, *Metaphor*, 140.

¹⁰ See for example, John Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*. See also Leonard Swidler, John Cobb, et. al, *Death or Dialogue?* London: SCM Press, 1990.

reinforcement.¹¹ Cobb is suspicious of any organising or categorial terms that might prejudice or limit dialogic conversation.

Cobb asserts the need for all traditions, including the Christian, to affirm their unique centres of meaning. He protests “that the pretense to stand beyond all traditions and build neutrally out of all of them is a delusion” and clearly asserts the uniqueness of his own religious tradition – Christianity – but eschews any suggestion that this implies any necessary superiority: he argues for “the Christian the rejection of all arrogance, exclusivism, and dogmatism in relation to other ways”.¹² The attractiveness of this paradigm lies in its clear assertion of the individual identity and integrity of the religions: none can be adequately interpreted in the terms of another; none can be viewed as in any sense subsumed within another. To that extent there is no confusion of dialogical motive. But it still rather begs the question that there are some religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam, for instance – where historical, if not theological or ideological, linkages militate against this paradigm as the most apposite context for the conduct of dialogue.

III. *Commensurable Pluralism*

A third sub-set exists alongside the standard and the radical sets of religious pluralism I have just outlined, and there are again two variants, namely *Complementarity Holistic* and *Dynamic Parallel* pluralism.

Complementarity Holistic Pluralism holds that religious differences may be discerned as *Complementary Particular Expressions which together comprise the Universal Whole*. The American Catholic scholar, Paul Knitter, exemplifies this category in that he proposes an idea of “unitive pluralism”.¹³ He argues that “in the contemporary pluralistic world there cannot be just one religion, but neither can there be many that exist in

¹¹ Cf. S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Hindus and Christians: A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought*. Vol. 5 of *Currents of Encounter: Studies on the Contact between Christianity and Other Religions, Beliefs and Cultures*. Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi; and Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1991, 178.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1985; *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue & Global Responsibility*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995.

‘indifferent tolerance’.”¹⁴ Knitter holds a relational view of truth wherein the differences and particularities of religions are reconciled, but not materially equivalent. The plurality of religions is not so much a matter of non-competing variant out-workings of a common ground or goal, but rather the mutual complementarity of different parts together comprising a complex whole. The world’s religions together comprise the whole of what religion is as such. The divine reality encountered and expressed variegatedly in and through different religions is not the One Reality behind religions, as it were, but the One Reality that is comprised by them all.

In similar fashion *Dynamic Parallel Pluralism* holds that religious differences are perceived as reflecting a *parallelism of religious phenomena*. This paradigmatic perspective may be gleaned from the phenomenological study of religion espoused by Ninian Smart and others. The question of commonness of goal or ground, let alone the notion of religions as parts that collectively comprise a whole, is not the focus. Rather, what is observed as a result of analysis of presented data – the phenomena that together comprise any given religion – is the presence of dynamic parallels rather than substantive ‘sameness’. From observation and concomitant analysis of religions can be discerned a number of dynamic parallels that are operative in and through their various narrative traditions. For example, all major religions contain a narrative account of an inherent less-than-satisfactory state of affairs for human existence, howsoever arrived at in terms of specific narratives. In all cases, however, this state of affairs requires some transformative action to overcome and so enable the attainment of an ultimate outcome or destiny. The stories expressing this vary, as do the doctrines and teachings relating thereto. But the dynamics contained within the differing narratives redound with parallel similarities.

So, on the basis of this paradigm, religious plurality may be interpreted in such a way as to yield points of dynamic commonality that yet preserves the integrity of difference. Religions are not variants of the same thing; but they may be understood to variably express parallel processes. The inference is that the essence or reality of religion lies in

¹⁴ Ariarajah, *op. cit.*, 177.

the dynamic processes rather than the veracity or otherwise of commensurable substantives.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the paradigms of exclusivism and inclusivism are premised on the notion that there is but one universal truth or religion whereby the relationship between the universal and specific religions is problematic. Either way it is taken as a *sine qua non* of 'universal' that there can be only one valid expression of it in terms of particular form. Thus the religious exclusivist makes an assumption that his or her religion is, in fact, the only universally true one. All others are necessarily false. The exclusivist advocates a form of direct isolation: the community of truth versus the communities of falsehood. The inclusivist holds views that allow for a measure of universal religious truth being found in more than one particular religion, but that, nonetheless, it is his or her religion that fully contains, or is the full expression of, the universal truth. The inclusivist may appear to have overcome the isolationist tendencies of exclusivism, but in fact a form of isolation remains: that of taking a metaphysical, if not also a moral, high-ground. So the paradigms of both exclusivism and inclusivism are problematic. Does this mean pluralism as such offers a way forward? Perhaps, but the paradigms of pluralism are no less problematic.

The notion of resolving religious isolationism based on a context of a preconceived common-point, be that a common ground Reality or a common salvific goal, seems to be somewhat presumptuous as well as cognitively constraining. In the end, this seems increasingly to be variants of the inclusivist paradigm, which, as with exclusivism, tends more to curtail genuine relational openness than facilitate it. By contrast, the paradigm of incommensurable pluralism, that of radically differentiated plurality, would seem to signal little point in pursuing interreligious, or inter-communal, relations: a fall-back into isolation ensues. But perhaps interreligious engagement based on the interdependent paradigm set of complementary holistic pluralism and dynamic parallel pluralism may offer a more realistic basis for a way forward in overcoming the potentially deadly effects of religious ideological isolationism. The aim of such engagement is not to reconcile

perspectives and beliefs across any two or more religions, but to grow in mutual understanding and also deeper self-understanding. Because actual religions are very different in many respects, neither has an inherent upper hand. Genuine difference and distinctiveness can be affirmed, thus there is scope for real advance in mutually beneficial and challenging positive interaction.

A number of key questions press upon religions today. To what extent do their ideologies and their behaviours collude with, or counter, contemporary withdrawals into communities of isolation, withdrawals that can lead to extremism and even terrorism? What model is employed to contend with inescapable plurality; the fact of religious diversity and difference both within and between religions? How may the religions enable the triumph of their own life-affirming values over the contemporary counter-tendency to arrogant assertions of life-constraining values and ideologies from within their ranks? Given the history of mutual misinformation and even outbreak of hostilities that has marked much interreligious engagement throughout history and up to the present day, and given in particular the contemporary climate of suspicion of things Islamic and corresponding Islamic antipathies to many aspects of the secularized West, then pursuing an apposite paradigm capable of providing a basis for interreligious engagement in the quest for harmonious inter-communal relations and the counter to extremist-fomenting isolationism would seem an urgent imperative.