

Interreligious Relations Today. Towards a Fourth Paradigm

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Abstrakt

Relacja międzyreligijne (interreligijne?) dzisiaj. Cztery paradygmaty

Wraz z przemianą świata w ‘globalną wioskę’ wszystkie wspólnoty religijne zostają zmuszone do zmierzenia się z faktem istnienia i obecności innych wyznań i wyznawców. Choć o ich istnieniu wiadano już długo wcześniej to nigdy nie były one tak widoczne i trudne do ignorowania jak przez ostatnie kilka dekad. Wspólnoty religijne mają kilka możliwości klasyfikowania ‘innych’. Tradycyjny pogląd, nazywany ekskluzywizmem, stopniowo zanika i jest dzisiaj reprezentowany tylko przez najbardziej konserwatywne kręgi. Najbardziej rozpowszechnionym punktem widzenia, przynajmniej wśród wykształconych adherentów, jest inkluzywizm, a więc postrzeganie własnej religii jako najlepszej lub najbliższej absolutowi przy jednoczesnym uznaniu, że w innych religiach znajdują się elementy prawdy. Wielu myślicieli religijnych traktuje inkluzywizm ciągle jako podejście aroganckie i jedynie bardziej ‘miękką’ formą ekskluzywizmu. Są oni na ogół zwolennikami paradygmatu pluralistycznego, który zaprzecza istnieniu jakiegokolwiek głównej, najlepszej lub uprzywilejowanej tradycji, jakiegokolwiek nadrzędnej odpowiedzi na objawienie. Wszystkie religie postrzegane są jako równe, jako kulturowo uwarunkowane odpowiedzi na Byt Absolutny. Choć ta pluralistyczna perspektywa jest obecnie bardzo popularna, jest też z wielu powodów krytykowana. Z tego względu przez ostatnie dziesięciolecie propagatorzy dialogu między religiami proponowali zarzucenie tradycyjnej typologii stosunków międzywyznaniowych (ekskluzywizm, inkluzywizm, populizm) i rezygnację z wysiłków ustanowienia wspólnej platformy porozumienia dla wszystkich religii lub stworzenie odpowiedniego metajęzyka. W tym czwartym paradygmacie próbuje się uniknąć słabości trzech wcześniejszych podejść, a zachować i ugruntować ich wartościowe elementy. Wydaje się również, że jest to paradygmat, który najlepiej koresponduje osiągnięciami antropologii kultury, filozofii języka i socjologii wiedzy.

As the world is progressively becoming a global village, religious communities are pressed (more than ever before) to think through their attitudes and relations to adherents of other religious traditions. They have known about religious others since long ago, but never has their presence been so visible and impossible to ignore as in the last several decades¹. Religious communities have come up with several basic paradigms of interreligious relations².

¹ On these trends see Netland H., *Dissonant Voices*, 4ff, also Atherton J., *Public Theology for Changing times*, 10ff, and Stackhouse M., *Public Theology and Political Economy*, 157ff.

² See the classical threefold typology in Race A., *Christian and Religious Pluralism*, 10nn, see also Dupuis J., *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 180ff.

The traditional view, called exclusivism³, views religious others as basically living in the darkness, out of touch with divine reality. They are hopelessly lost and if there is any hope for their salvation, they must leave their religion and convert to the only true (or revealed) religion (which is the religion of the person in question, i.e. of the exclusivist). This view has been the most common in the history of religions, especially of monotheistic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam). Today it is progressively disappearing. It is still held primarily in the most conservative circles.

The most common view today, particularly among main-stream educated religious believers of established religions, is called inclusivism⁴. It views one's own tradition as relatively best or closest to absolute (or revealed) truth. Yet it also acknowledges universal presence of divine truth and its accessibility outside of one's own religious tradition (whenever and wherever people honestly seek the truth). Salvation (or redemption or achieving the highest religious ideal) is therefore possible (potentially) for anybody, since divine salvific self-communication is universal. But inclusivists are not willing to give up the centrality and/or normativity of their particular tradition. There is a sense in which inclusivism is a softer and more generous kind of exclusivism.

Many scholars do not feel comfortable with the inclusivist claim that theirs is the relatively best interpretation of general and universal human condition and of ultimate reality. So they vote for a more radical paradigm shift. With the collapse of the premodern epistemological naivete and the positivist ideal of unbiased reason as the sure way to objective truth, the possibility of context-free universal knowledge is suspect and untenable. Postmodern situation makes all meta-narratives questionable. Those who vote for this radical paradigm shift in religious epistemology call for a "Copernican revolution"⁵ or for "crossing the Rubicon"⁶ from inclusivism to pluralism. They deny the existence of any central or best or privileged religious tradition, any superior or normative response to divine revelation. All human knowledge (including religious knowledge) is situated, historically, culturally and socially conditioned. Therefore all religions must be viewed as basically equal, as different responses to ultimate Reality.

³ For a concise description see Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, 10ff, see also Knitter P., *Introducing Theologies of religions*, 19ff, and Kärkkäinen V., *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 174ff.

⁴ See for example Oberhammer G., ed., *Inklusivismus. Eine indische Denkform*, Wien, 1988. See also Knitter, *Introducing*, 63ff, and Kärkkäinen, *Introduction*, 190ff.

⁵ On this program, proposed in J. Hick's writings (*God Has Many Names, God and the Universe of Faiths*) see Sinkinson Ch., *The Universe of Faiths*, 10ff.

This so called pluralist paradigm of interreligious relations is growing in popularity, especially among Western intelligentsia. In this paper, I want to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of this third paradigm, and present some recent criticism of the pluralist proposal. Those who find the pluralist paradigm unsatisfactory, vote for a new (fourth) paradigm of interreligious relations, which I want to present in the last part of my paper as the so far relatively most satisfactory response to the contemporary religious situation of our progressively shrinking world (several mutually incompatible religious traditions and their respective communities living alongside each other on a rapidly globalized and culturally unifying planet earth).

The pluralist approach to interreligious relations starts with religion as a generic term⁷. Behind the wide range of both extinct and living religious traditions and behind the vast variety of religious phenomena, the proponents of the pluralist paradigm see a common essence. There is therefore an essentialist view of religion⁸. Different religions are particular instances of the same species⁹. They recognize the irreconcilable differences among religions yet they put more emphasis on what is common. They use the comparative method and point to commonalities and similarities among religions: patterns of religious behaviour such as prayer, sacrifice, worship, asceticism, the function of myth and ritual in religious societies (providing orientation, basis for social order etc.) These similarities point (in their view) to the common essence or source of all religions. Religions are viewed as human responses to the Absolute, to the really Real, to ultimate reality¹⁰. Since religious traditions came into being in different cultural and geographical environments, they naturally differ from each other. Yet their differences are in a sense only apparent and accidental, they are caused by different historical circumstances. Two illustrations of the pluralist paradigm, which are used most commonly, are the picture of a mountain and the picture of four blind men touching an elephant. These illustrations supposedly explain the apparent differences among religions. Different religions are viewed as different paths, all leading eventually to the top of the same mountain. Or, different religions are like four blind men each approaching an elephant from a different angle. One blind man (touching the elephant's leg) thinks that elephant is some kind of a tree. Another touches the elephant's tail and thinks

⁶ Knitter in Swidler L., ed., *Toward a Universal Theology of Religions*, 228.

⁷ A critique of this starting point see in Milbank J., *The End of Dialogue*, in D'Costa G., ed., *Christian Uniqueness reconsidered*, 176ff.

⁸ Richards, *Towards a Theology of Religions*, 36ff.

⁹ Hick J., *An Interpretation of Religion*, 3f.

¹⁰ Hick, *Interpretation*, 236ff.

elephant is some kind of a rope etc. The blindness and difference of angle represents our situatedness and limitedness, which account for the differences among religions.

Some pluralists focus on the historicity of all religious traditions and derive equality of all religions from that¹¹. Others focus on the esoteric, or mystical experience, which in their view is the same in all religions and differences come only at the externalized, verbal level¹². Others points to the common goal of all religions which is salvation-redemption-liberation from forces of alienation and evil¹³.

For example, J. Hick defines religions as historically conditioned human responses to the Real. Their common goal is to transform human beings from self-centredness to Reality-centredness¹⁴. Their mark of authenticity is production of saints. W. Cantwell Smith distinguishes in all religions the level of personal faith and the level of cumulative tradition¹⁵. While there are conflicts among the verbalized cumulative traditions, personal faith of all sincere religious believers is essentially the same. That is why Smith wants to develop an all-inclusive world theology. Similarly L. Swidler wants to develop an interreligious Esperanto¹⁶, a true global philosophy/theology of religion with contributions from all living religious traditions¹⁷. These thinkers have to give account of the exclusive claims which most religions make concerning truth and normativity. For Smith exclusive claims concerning Jesus Christ, for example, have to be understood as an expression of existential commitment, not as metaphysical claims with universal validity. They belong to the context of worship and witness, not to the context of ontology. Similarly K. Stendhal speaks in this context about "love language" of religious believers¹⁸. "Jesus is the only way" means and should be understood "Jesus is the only way for me", similarly as when somebody says "my wife is the best woman in the world".

The most common criticism of the pluralist paradigm of interreligious relations is that it is not pluralist enough¹⁹. Indeed, it proposes an all-inclusive theory which gives account of the vast diversity of world religions, putting them all under the same umbrella of a universal notion of

¹¹ Hick J., Knitter P., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 3ff.

¹² Hick and Knitter *Myth*, 53ff.

¹³ Hick and Knitter, *Myth*, 137ff.

¹⁴ Hick J., *Interpretation*, 36ff, 299ff.

¹⁵ Smith W.C., *Idolatry*, in Hick and Knitter, *Myth*, 59.

¹⁶ Swidler L., *Toward*, 20ff. See also Smith's book *The Meaning and End of Religion*.

¹⁷ See W.C.Smith, *Towards a World Theology*.

¹⁸ See Stendhal's essay in Anderson G., Stransky T., *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, 14. See also (for a Christian version of this approach) Ariarajah W., *The Bible and People of Other Faiths*, 19ff.

religion. This approach tends to undermine and downplay the differences among religions. It is to a large extent influenced by the Enlightenment universal rationalism²⁰, and in a sense, just another case of an all-inclusive metanarrative²¹, towards which, as is well known, contemporary postmodern thinkers tend to be highly incredulous²². Pluralist paradigm doesn't really show sufficient respect to the otherness of the Other, it assimilates all otherness into the Same by including it into its universal theory²³.

Many contemporary thinkers question the common presupposition of most pluralists, that the core (essence) of religion is prereflective and preverbal religious experience, which only secondarily takes a verbal, externalized form. Cultural anthropologists like C. Geertz²⁴ claim that the externalized and verbalized tradition is actually not secondary, it is one of the decisive and most important factors in every religious community. Religions are systems of symbols that give meaning, sense of identity and direction for the individual's life and for the community. Religion is a socially constructed reality, says the sociologist P. Berger²⁵, it is a symbolic universe or semantic code which shapes the lives of religious believers, including their life style, ethics and patterns of religious experience. Some scholars fruitfully apply on religions the Wittgensteinian concept of language games. Religious tradition is a particular use of language, with its own depth grammar, and with a corresponding form of life which it encourages and shapes in religious believers. The famous Protestant theologian K. Barth also insists (though for different, i.e. theological reasons) on the decisive importance of proclaimed message (*verbum externum*)²⁶. The shared linguistic paradigm, the common verbalized vision of reality is the defining factor of each particular religion. And it is exactly this *verbum externum* that creates corresponding inner experience and shapes the forms, patterns and structures of religious practice. From the perspective of this cultural-linguistic view of religion²⁷ it is impossible to assume a common

¹⁹ Cobb J., *Beyond Pluralism*, in D'Costa ed., *Christian*, 81. See also DiNoia, *Pluralist Theology of Religions*, in D'Costa, *Christian*, 119ff. Similarly Heim M., *Salvations*, 23ff.

²⁰ For this connection between pluralism and Enlightenment epistemology see Sinkinson Ch., *The Universe of Faiths*, 104ff.

²¹ On this see D'Costa G., *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 19ff.

²² J. Hick's response to this criticism see in his *A Christian Theology of Religions*, 31ff.

²³ On the tendency of the pluralist paradigm of "domesticating the other" see Surin K., *A Politics of Speech*, in D'Costa, *Christian*, 200.

²⁴ See his *Religion as a Cultural System*, in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, 1973, 87-125.

²⁵ See his and T. Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*, Doubleday and Co., 1967.

²⁶ For a barthian view of religion and interreligious relations, expressing this perspective see Lochhead D., *Dialogical Imperative*, 31ff.

²⁷ See Lindbeck G., *The Nature of Doctrine*, 32ff. See also Hillman E., *Many Paths*, 4-23.

essence of all religions in the depths of mystical experience. It is speculative and aprioristic. Religions are as different and incompatible as the languages they speak. Their languages are to a large extent idiomatic²⁸, and so are their corresponding life forms.

What does this imply concerning mutual translatability? One cannot take a religious claim (such as the Buddhist *karuna* doctrine) out of context and compare it with another seemingly corresponding context ridden concept (such as the Christian *agape*) or translate one into the other²⁹. All religious claims derive their meaning and actually only make sense in the context of the entire symbolic universe (language world) of the particular religious tradition. One cannot divorce the alleged prelinguistic experiential (spiritual) stratum of religious life from its linguistic (outward) stratum (as the pluralists do), these two are closely tied and actually inseparable.

The critics of the pluralist paradigm discern in the background of that view not only Enlightenment epistemology with its effort to assimilate all otherness into sameness, but also a basically monotheistic, eurocentric presuppositions. The assumption that there is one divine self-manifesting ultimate reality is basically a biblical concept, and therefore biased and unjustified when presented to the adherents of non-theistic and non-European traditions. Pluralists use an unjustified meta-language which looks at all religions from a distance and pretends objectivity and neutrality (to refer back to the two metaphors of the pluralist paradigm, the pluralists themselves, and they only, are not blind, so they see the whole elephant, they only see the mountain from the top). The pluralists deny or not recognize their own culturally shaped and historically situated pre-understanding and corresponding bias and/or hermeneutical circle.

Moreover, most pluralists come from a Christian background and the emotional power of their argument is that a just and loving God would not leave the "pagans" without salvific knowledge³⁰. This argument was actually the *raison d'être* of the pluralist paradigm. However noble this motivation is, a meta-theory of interreligious relations obviously cannot start from theological considerations or soteriological concerns of one particular tradition.

But let us notice one more point about this theological presupposition: Pluralists argue that both exclusivist and inclusivist theories contain an untenable and even immoral assumption, that most religious believers in the world (i.e. those who do not belong to the right camp) are essentially

²⁸ Lindbeck, *Nature*, 129.

²⁹ On these attempts see Hick, *Interpretation*, 325ff.

³⁰ See W.C.Smith's essay in Hick J. and Hebblethwaite, *Christianity and Other Religions*, 106, see also Hillman E., *Many Paths*, 24nn.

wrong and mislead in their basic religious convictions³¹. That cannot be true and it is arrogant to assume that, say the pluralists³². Yet, object their critics, the pluralist theory says that Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists etc. worship the same one absolute Reality, which some call the Trinity, some call it Allah, some Brahma, but the real Absolute is beyond and behind these culturally conditioned expressions and names. Now, this is exactly what the pluralists criticize about exclusivists and inclusivists: the pluralist paradigm no less implies that most (actually all, with the exception of pluralists themselves) are essentially wrong and misled in their basic religious convictions³³. Another common criticism of the pluralist paradigm is closely related: since most practising believers are not going to exchange the Trinity, Allah or Brahma for some vague abstract concept of the ultimate Reality³⁴, the pluralists are to a large extent an isolated group. Although they put much effort into organizing interfaith activities and interreligious dialogue, they do not really represent the believers of their respective traditions, the majority of which are either exclusivists or inclusivists.

Moreover, the question must be asked what is the point of interreligious dialogue within the pluralist framework³⁵. The most fruitful encounter is an encounter with the other, with people who are significantly different. Only there can a genuine dialogue and mutually enriching exchange take place. But pluralists tend to put all the differences and conflicting truth claims into brackets³⁶, they underestimate the incompatibilities among religions and explain them away as mythological language, personal language, love language, existential commitments without ontological validity etc³⁷.

These and other similar shortcomings of the pluralist proposal lead to a growing dissatisfaction among scholars seriously engaged in the theory and practice of interreligious relations. In the last ten or fifteen years, serious proposals have been made to leave the traditional threefold typology - exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism (or, in the Christian version ecclesiocentrism, christocentrism and theocentrism) and to start from a different ground. This traditional typology was

³¹ For this argument see W.C.Smith's essay in Hick and Hebblethwaite, *Christianity*, 98-99.

³² On this see Hellwig M., *Christology in the Wider Ecumenism*, in D'Costa, *Christian*, 107.

³³ DiNoia, *Pluralist Theology of Religions*, in D'Costa, *Christian*, 128.

³⁴ The pluralists insist on the mysterious and ineffable nature of the Real or ultimate reality. Yet their own description of the ultimate reality is in conflict with what they say about its essential ineffability, see Sinkinson, *The Universe of Faiths*, 137ff.

³⁵ Moltmann J., *Is "Pluralistic Theology" Useful for the Dialogue of World Religions?*, in D'Costa, *Christian*, 149.

³⁶ On the pluralist tendency to redefine the concept of truth so as to avoid the embarrassment of conflicting truth claims see Race, *Christian*, 138ff, on "deabsolutizing truth" see Swidler, *Toward*, 7ff, similarly Bernhardt, *Christianity without Absolutes*, 119ff, 126ff.

disproportionately focused on the soteriological question: who and under what conditions can be saved. The alternative, but very similar typology - ecclesiocentrism, christocentrism, theocentrism - again focuses on what is essential in one's attaining salvation or coming to a salvific knowledge of God or the absolute reality.

Moreover, all three traditional paradigms are aprioristic: they are in a sense finished before they start, i.e. they have a ready made evaluation or classification of religions before they begin any serious engagement with their adherents, their sacred texts, their socio-cultural reality.

Among those scholars who want to move beyond the traditional framework of the discourse on interreligious relations, several different proposals have been made. All these proposals have some elements in common: they want to take much more seriously the idiomatic quality of particular religious traditions, they want to emphasize differences and divergencies just as much as commonalities and convergencies. They want to be really pluralistic - i.e. they give up or postpone the attempts at creating an all-inclusive universal theory of the religious dimension of human being. They recognize the Enlightenment bias behind the so called "pluralist paradigm" which creates a rationalist meta-theory for all religions, not acknowledging or respecting the otherness of the other³⁸.

There is space within the emerging fourth paradigm for true insights of all three traditional paradigms, yet it seems we need to move beyond all of them³⁹.

Exclusivism, which in this and other contexts should better be called particularism, is true in insisting on the irreducible and unnegotiable otherness of each religious symbolic universe. As has already been said above, the idiomatic nature of any linguistic system of symbols seriously limits mutual translatability of different symbolic universes, i.e. of different linguistically encoded religious visions. It also seriously limits or actually excludes the possibility of establishing a common ground of all religions or to extrapolate a supposedly common essence behind diverse religious symbols as their ineffable ontological correlate. In this, particularism agrees with the essential insights of the emerging fourth paradigm.

Particularism also seems to be right in light of the teleological aspect of each religious

³⁷ For criticism of this tendency see D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 27.

³⁸ On the necessity of respecting "the real, not a projected Other" see Tracy D., *Dialogue with the Other*, 4.

³⁹ Barnes, *Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, i, 3nn. See also what Barnes says about parallelism as an alternative to the traditional paradigms, *ibid.*, 17. About the necessity of moving beyond the threefold typology see also DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions*, 47ff.

tradition⁴⁰. All religions strive by means of their primordial stories, myths, rituals, ethical codes, doctrinal creeds etc. to produce a corresponding form of life, on both individual and corporate levels. Religions produce or create particular types of human being, often expressed in relation with the desired post mortem destiny of practising believers⁴¹. In other words, a Buddhist lives in a way that makes him ready for Nirvana, a Hindu shapes his or her life so that after death he or she can dissolve in the Brahma, a Christian follows Christ and looks forward to an eternal fellowship with the triune God after death etc. These particular forms of life are produced by the particular character of each religion's linguistic universe. Diversity of religious ends (i.e. ultimate aims) is reflected in the particular linguistic patterns and/or paradigms and the corresponding forms of life. Nirvana is not God's kingdom, God's kingdom is not the Muslim Paradise, the Muslim Paradise is not the mystical fusion of Atman with Brahma etc. Religious practitioners are not climbing to the top of the same mountain, they are rather climbing to different tops of different mountains. A Christian doesn't want to get to Nirvana, just as a Buddhist doesn't want to get to Christian heaven or New Jerusalem⁴². This much seems to be true in the particularist paradigm.

But particularism tends to go too far in pronouncing judgements about other religions, without really taking time to study what they actually say. That is the main objection of the proponents of the fourth paradigm against exclusivism/particularism.

What is true and acceptable about the second paradigm? Inclusivism, now probably the most common view, particularly among mainstream religious believers, expresses two natural attitudes or ambitions: 1) to have a generous and/or politically correct view of religious others and 2) to have an all-inclusive theory with some explanation of the religious diversity of humankind. Therefore inclusivism leaves open the possibility of salvation of religious others and is generally very optimistic in that regard⁴³. It assumes that since all humankind is one family and since the nature of ultimate reality is (broadly speaking) benevolent, there is good chance that every human being (who sincerely desires so) will achieve the ultimate religious goal. This seems acceptable, however impossible to prove.

⁴⁰ See Heim, *Salvations*, 129ff, and also Heim, *The Depth of the Riches*, 17ff.

⁴¹ See DiNoia, *Diversity*, 56.

⁴² See Heim, *Salvations*, 158ff, and his *The Depth of the Riches*, 243ff.

⁴³ See in this regard the development of the view of the Roman Catholic Magisterium over the last several decades, particularly since the II. Vatican Council, cf. Netland H., *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, 43-46 and Fornberg T., *The Problem of Christianity in Multi-religious Societies Today*, 15ff.

Yet the proponents of the fourth paradigm have some objections against this second paradigm: the inclusivists assume a priori (without convincing justification) that 1) we can have an all-inclusive meta-theory of religions and 2) that their tradition is the relatively best articulation of religious truth. So the inclusivists try to develop a (paradoxical) tradition-specific universal meta-theory, which, for obvious reasons, is vulnerable.

Yet, the inclusivists' assumptions of 1) the essential unity of humankind and 2) of the benevolence of the absolute or divine reality are both noble and plausible presuppositions.

What do the proponents of the fourth paradigm have to say concerning pluralism? Pluralists want to go one radical step further (comparing with inclusivists): they deny the existence of any privileged, central or normative religious tradition⁴⁴. Their view is therefore the most egalitarian or democratic. And they are in a sense right: the relative superiority of one's own religious tradition can be a statement of faith or existential creed (at the very most), it can never be taken or imposed as a given fact. Pluralists criticize pride, arrogance and paternalizing attitude of many exclusivists and inclusivists, and rightly so. They want to humbly respect religious others in their own authentic religiosity. And this is praiseworthy.

But they are not radical enough, say the proponents of the fourth paradigm. They are seduced by the passion for a system⁴⁵, by the logocentric ambition to have one universal theory that gives account of everything⁴⁶. We should remain humbly agnostic⁴⁷ towards religious others, we should engage in dialogue and cooperation with them, without premature classifications or ready made meta-theories, be they unwelcome compliments (like Rahner's anonymous Christianity) or expressions of presumptuous pride. Perhaps, as we are engaged in dialogue and listening to each other, we have to patiently wait for a new ontological framework, perhaps we will never find one, maybe we don't need to. Perhaps the plurality and diversity of religions has a deep and positive meaning⁴⁸. Perhaps reality is pluralistic (ontologically)⁴⁹, perhaps we will find some convergencies in the future, perhaps one religious tradition will eventually win world-wide massive acceptance, perhaps there will always remain irreconcilable differences and plurality of

⁴⁴ Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, 140ff.

⁴⁵ See Milbank's criticism in *The End of Dialogue*, in D'Costa, *Christian*, 174ff, where he speaks in this context about "the myth of Western universalism".

⁴⁶ On this ambition see Cobb, *Beyond Pluralism*, in D'Costa, *Christian*, 81.

⁴⁷ See Lochhead D., *Dialogical Imperative*, 40nn.

⁴⁸ On the "providential" function of religious diversity see DiNoia, *Diversity*, 65nn.

living religious traditions. So be it. For the time being, we should probably give up on all-inclusive theories and let different religious communities meet, cooperate with each other and friendly compete in goodness⁵⁰.

What seems to be most important and urgent today, in our rapidly globalizing world, is to overcome xenophobia and alienation among religions, to engage in interreligious encounters, dialogue sessions and mutual cooperation, in both formal and informal settings, and on local, national and international levels⁵¹. I think the emerging fourth paradigm of interreligious relations can serve as a suitable platform for these activities, better, in my judgement, than the exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist alternatives.

⁴⁹ Several Christian thinkers suggest the trinitarian notion of deity as a suitable ontological framework giving account of the diversity of religions and expressing the intrinsic plurality of being (or of ultimate reality), see the works of G. D'Costa, M.Heim, R.Panikkar and others.

⁵⁰ On this attitude of openness which is not in conflict with one's faithfulness to his or her own tradition see Cobb, *Beyond Pluralism*, in D'Costa, *Christian*, 91ff, and also his book *Transforming Christianity and the World*.

⁵¹ See H. Küng's project of global ethics, in Küng, *Global Responsibility*.

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