

PLURALITY AND UNITY WITHIN INTRARELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

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1. Introduction

The plural nature of intrareligious discourse and its normative strategies help to preserve as well as set limits to the plurality we experience in our existential situations. By 'intrareligious' I mean the discourse prevalent *within* any given religious tradition, though much of my argumentation could usefully be extrapolated to the field of interreligious discourse as well, i.e., the discourse *between* persons and communities of different religious traditions. By 'discourse' I mean communication comprising of a specific concern, context, orientation, and terminology. The term 'discourse' in this study includes not only the cognitive dimensions of religious language, but also affective, existential, practical, and social dimensions of religious communication in general.¹

This article is divided into four parts. The first is *descriptive* or phenomenological, in which I outline various types of religious discourse prevalent within religious traditions. The purpose of this descriptive approach with regard to different discourses within the domain of religion is to heighten awareness with regard to a prevalent diversity within religious discourse in general. The second and the third parts are *normative*, in which I argue for the validity of both the sustenance of plurality and the limits to such a plurality when it engenders alienation and violence. In the second part, I highlight the major reasons supporting the value of plurality within religious discourse. I argue that plurality or diversity is not a limitation or threat to be overcome but a phenomenon to

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¹For a succinct overview of the different definitions and interpretations of the term 'discourse' in a variety of disciplines within the liberal arts, see Sara Mills, *Discourse*, London: Routledge, 2007. The problem with defining the term 'discourse', as Mills points out, is that the term "cannot be pinned down to one meaning, since it has had a complex history and it is used in a range of different ways by different theorists, and sometimes even by the same theorist" (5-6).

be treasured in terms of the development of the tradition itself. In the third part, I outline limits to plurality when it is in danger of fragmenting the unity of intrareligious, interreligious, and social discourse in general. Whenever one or more discourses within a religious tradition is in danger of jeopardizing the common good, these discourses need to be challenged by recourse to more universal, rational, and moral considerations. The fourth part is *strategic* or methodological, in which I lay the groundwork for the sustenance of both plurality and unity via the discourse form of intrareligious dialogue. Firstly, believers engaging in different discourses within the same tradition have a lot to learn from and contribute to one another's development. Secondly, dialogue with one another is sometimes necessary in order to challenge violent interpretations of a religious tradition, not only for the sake of the tradition in question, but also for the larger social good.

2. Plurality of Intrareligious Discourse

Religious discourse is characterized by immense variety, not only when one compares one religion with other religions, but even within any given religion itself. Among the world religions, one may perceive a discursive affinity between religions which arise from similar geo-social circumstances. For example, the Middle Eastern religions (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) share elements such as prophecy, divine transcendence, and the importance given to authoritatively revealed texts. The Eastern religions, in contrast (Hinduism and Jainism in India, Buddhism in India and the Far East, and Confucianism and Taoism in China), give more importance to mysticism, divine immanence, and an orally communicated revelatory tradition. Thus, it is that many scholars pay attention to two fundamentally paradigmatic religious discourses, viz., the prophetic and the mystical, as broadly representative of the Middle Eastern and the Eastern (South Asian and Far Eastern) pathways towards the sacred.² At the level of philosophical and theological scholarship, these may, indeed, appear to be the two most fundamental or dominant forms of religious discourse. However, what seems to be more characteristic of

²See, for example, David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue*, Louvain: Peeters Press, 1990. See also Chapter Six, "Between Jerusalem and Benares: The Coming Contestation of Religions," of Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, London: Collins, 1980, wherein Berger contrasts two distinct types of religious experience: "*confrontation with the divine*" and "*interiority of the divine*" (168, original italics).

belief at the folk level are ‘cultic’, ‘ecstatic’, and a whole host of alternative discourses, features of which I will now highlight.³

In an earlier article, I had systematically described a wide variety of forms of religious experience and expression.⁴ What I will now outline is the core concern and orientation of each of these forms of experience and expression (which I subsume under the category of ‘discourse’). Each of these forms of discourse is a conscious or subconscious attempt to reduce religion to its most significant elements, as interpreted by the agents who share and propagate the discourse in question. *Cultic* discourse is characterised by faithfulness towards liturgical or paraliturgical ritualistic practices. Regularity and propriety of ritual and sacramental form are given importance in this discourse. *Moral* discourse is focused on the cultivation of righteous lifestyles and life options. The impact of religious values on the practical sphere – and the correspondence between these two realms – is given greater importance. *Ecstatic* discourse values personal religious conversion and spontaneous forms of prayer. Spiritual authenticity based on a personal and joyful relationship with the divine is given a premium. *Cosmic* discourse is oriented towards a harmonious relationship with the elements and processes of nature. A symbiotic relationship with the earth based on a spiritual worldview is the operative disposition in this case. *Ascetic* discourse values renunciation and discipline. Accordingly, simplicity of lifestyle, or a renunciation of family ties, or an abandonment of personal career goals – or a combination of these and other forms of renunciation – are willingly embraced. *Prophetic* discourse is driven towards interpersonal and structural change. Challenging unjust systems and relationships on the basis of spiritual and moral principles is given greater priority. *Mystic* discourse underscores the primacy of unitive experiences. Overcoming a psycho-spiritual alienation with the ‘other’ – especially with the divine – in its various forms is the

³For example, Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta is often considered to be a representative of Indian philosophy and religion in the West, while, in fact, there are numerous schools of not only classical philosophy but also *bhakti* and contemporary philosophies, which are quite different in substance and form from that of Advaita Vedanta and, in fact, more representative of contemporary popular Indian religious experience.

⁴See Keith D’Souza, “Religion: A Notional Clarification” in George Karuvelil, ed., *Romancing the Sacred? Towards an Indian Christian Philosophy of Religion*, ATC: Bangalore, 2007, 39-69.

primary goal. *Pluralistic* discourse values dialogue and mutual influencing. Learning from, and contributing to the development of other religious traditions is considered an important contemporary spiritual pathway. *Harmonic* discourse is focused on personal growth and self-actualization. Discernment, meditation, and different forms of psycho-physical practices towards personal wellbeing are some of the pathways adopted.

These were the nine discourse types I had earlier described, though more elaborately.⁵ To this list I now add four more, viz., the ‘agapeic’, the ‘gnostic’, the intellectual, and the official. ‘*Agapeic*’ discourse values the cultivation of self-giving, inclusive and charitable love, and the creation of loving communities.⁶ Living in faith communities which share similar values and engaging with the larger world in different voluntary and service capacities is the pathway followed here. ‘*Gnostic*’ discourse values inner knowledge as the means towards enlightenment. The focus here is on conquering the self and overcoming ignorance (*avidya*) and attachment.⁷ *Academic* discourse values reflection and argumentation as a means towards truth, goodness, and beauty. Rational exploration, in order to understand and validate different dimensions of human life from a faith perspective, is afforded greater importance. Finally, *official* discourse values loyalty towards hierarchical and administrative leadership, and towards authoritative texts. Faithfulness and an attitude of obedience towards the tradition and its leaders – and their interpretation of the tradition – are given greater importance.

⁵D’Souza, “Religion: A Notional Clarification,” 51ff., for a fuller exposition of each of these types of discourse.

⁶*Agape* in Greek (or ‘*caritas*’ in Latin) is a unique type of love (the love of charity), as opposed to *storge* (affectionate love based on natural relationships, e.g., familial relationships), *philia* (the love of friendship) and *eros* (erotic or sensual love). See C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, London: Fount/Harper Collins, 1960, for a good description of these four basic types of love. Also, see the Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, Mumbai: Pauline Publications, 2006, for the complementary but eventually contrasting nature of two types of love, viz., *eros* and *agape*.

⁷See Aloysius Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989, wherein Pieris contrasts “the *gnostic* and the *agapeic* instincts of the human person ... *Gnosis* is salvific knowledge and *agape* is redemptive love” (9, original italics).

These “manifold manifestations of religious experience and expression”⁸ may be perceived to be unique combinations of three primary dimensions of religious discourse in general. Each of these dimensions, in turn, is rooted in three fundamental human desires. The *hermeneutical* dimension of religious experience and expression is rooted in our desire for cognitive meaning and purpose, the *existential* dimension is rooted in our desire for affective fulfilment, and the *communitarian* dimension is rooted in our desire for social belonging and involvement. Each of the discourse types listed above is a unique combination of these three desires or interests: cognitive, affective, and volitional. Furthermore, each of these discourses will “have a particular *focus*, be represented by specific *agents*, will be supported by certain *institutions*, will be based upon favoured *foundational texts* and will represent a certain *fundamental experience* of the religious spirit.”⁹ Through these and other means, specific communities or religious subgroups tend to be generated and perpetuated by these different discourses.

Rather than merely engage in one type of discourse, believers (and communities of believers) typically subscribe to a unique cluster (or complex or combination) of discourses, each cluster depending on a wide variety of influences and interests. Believers would, thus, tend to operate from an implicit or explicit hierarchy of discourses (valuing one discourse more highly over others) – both within these clusters and with respect to discourses that fall outside these clusters. The nature and scope of these clusters or combinations are subject to change, depending on various circumstances, interests and needs. For example, the 2009 World Social Forum, held in Belem, Brazil, witnessed both a partial conflict of interests and an attempted reconciliation between two socially relevant discourses, viz., the prophetic (with a stress on justice for the poor) and the cosmic (with a stress on ecological harmony). Many of the participants at this forum have strong religious moorings, and may have been challenged to relate these (ostensibly secular) social and cosmic concerns with aspects of their traditions which pay greater attention to these elements. What may hopefully emerge from the meeting of these two discourses is a consciously developed ‘prophetic-cosmic’ religious discourse combination.

⁸D’Souza, “Religion: A Notional Clarification,” 51.

⁹D’Souza, “Religion: A Notional Clarification,” 52, original italics.

There are obviously manifest hierarchies which develop over time in any religious tradition – one discourse, or a specific combination of discourses tending to dominate during a certain spacio-temporal framework in the development of the tradition. However, it is difficult to develop a *normative* hierarchy between these different discourses, and even more so, between different combinations of these discourses. This is because there is no supra-normative position from which one may develop this hierarchy. Even in the process of establishing the core or determining criteria of any religious tradition, it is quite likely that one's personal or community's preferences and interpretations come into play in the construction of this hierarchy. What has happened historically is that at different places and times, and in different circumstances, one type of discourse (or discourse combination) either spontaneously took prominence and got better developed (by employing human and other infrastructural resources) or was developed more consciously and systematically, because of its perceived necessity and significance, or because it had more power to develop as compared to other discourses.

When one considers the nature of interreligious relations, attention is paid to the dominating theme of 'otherness' which distinguishes one religion from another. Every major religion has its own presuppositions, assumptions, and alternative religious systems; however similar they may be in terms of historical background, they constitute a thick or hard sense of 'otherness'. However, the 'otherness' in intrareligious discourse is different from the 'otherness' in interreligious discourse. In the former, the 'other' (believer or subgroup) is not a 'hard other' in the strict sense, but rather a comparatively 'soft other'. This is because the 'other's' intrareligious discourse shares many religious and even cultural grounds of meaning and purpose, even though different aspects of religion and culture are valued differently in each of these discourses within the same religious tradition. As these discourses do not exist in isolation from one another, there is a constant interaction between them, not only in the minds and hearts of believers who may subscribe to one or more discourses at a time, but also between believers who think and feel differently about religious issues as they relate with the larger realities of socio-political life. In the words of Gerald Arbuckle,

Every culture consists of subcultures all of which share to varying degrees common myths, symbols, and rituals, while at the same time having their own distinctive qualities. Relationships between

*subcultures may range from mutual respect to distrust, suspicion, fear, extreme hostility, rejection, and oppression.*¹⁰

Given the wide range of the nature of these relationships – from a placid and healthy extreme of mutual respect, on the one hand, to the other extreme of oppression and violence, on the other – it is fitting to ask how best these different sub-cultural discourses (and in our context, sub-religious discourses) ought to relate with one another. This consideration invites us to go beyond the realm of merely phenomenological description and enter into the area of normative considerations which would need to govern the relationship between these different discourses. I will now argue that it is necessary to protect and make space for the phenomenon of this type of internal otherness, while at the same time to delineate transcendently unifying principles and processes which serve to bind these different discourses together whenever necessary. The first necessity (of making space for the ‘other’) arises from an interest based on the wisdom of plurality. The second necessity (of highlighting strands of commonness or unity) arises from another interest, viz., the interest of overcoming alienation and violence. We shall now turn our attention to the first necessity, viz., the necessity of making space for the ‘other’ in order to sustain intrareligious plurality.

3. The Value of Intrareligious Plurality

The phenomenon of the plurality of religions has been one of the conditions, if not one of the actual causes, for social disharmony and even conflict since time immemorial. This has taken place for various reasons and at different levels: socio-political, philosophico-theological, and at the level of ordinary ritual practices in a common domain or shared public space. At all of these levels, the ‘other’ has often been, at the very least, misunderstood and, at the other extreme, considered to be a potential or actual threat to the existence and sustenance of one’s own religious tradition. This dynamic of flawed relationships between religious adherents (from misunderstanding, on the one extreme, through perceived and actual threat, on the other) would seem to be easily circumvented when it comes to relating with persons and communities who share a common religious background. But this has not always been the case. The histories of most major religions have seen serious ideological and

¹⁰Gerald Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004, 26, original italics.

political schisms, often leading to serious conflict situations lasting several years. These conflict situations can often be traced to specific attempts at a *mutual correction* between some of these different discourses. The desire for mutual correction (of especially extreme positions adopted by one or other discourse) arises when there is a perceived need to lay greater emphasis on one or other set of complementary or even contradictory values and practices. To give a benign example, some of the religious orders in Catholicism arose in the context of social situations in which religious leaders resorted to lifestyles which were perceived to be contrary to the wisdom of the tradition. In numerous other cases, however, those who proposed alternative discourses in order to correct or reform the tradition soon found themselves outside the tradition itself. Such was the case with the foundation of Christianity by Jesus and his followers, who attempted to correct perceived aberrations of Judaism but met with rejection. Similarly, the foundation of Protestantism was partially linked to a correction of perceived aberrations which had crept into late medieval western Christian theology and praxis. In India, the foundation of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism were also partially intended to be corrections or modifications of the existing religious beliefs and social practices of the time. Many of the founders of these new religious groups initially attempted to create a space for themselves and their followers. These attempts were mostly unsuccessful (as this space was not duly recognized), leading first to the emergence of a new sect, then a new religious movement and, finally, a full-blown new religion. Many of these conflicts and schisms, on hindsight, seem to have been unnecessary and to have resulted in a colossal waste of human resources and life. Most of the reformers would not have considered their thought and practices to be in total discontinuity with the founding tradition. Rather, in many cases, successive rejections by the mother community and its governing authorities led to an eventual parting of the ways. Today, some of the descendants of the split religious traditions in question are faced with the burden of having to heal the wounds of the past and, in some cases, the arduous task of moving towards reconciliation and unity.

The sustenance of a pluralistic approach towards intrareligious discourse would serve to neutralize the conditions for unnecessary disharmony and conflict. In many cases, if some of the discourses (often novel ones) are not given an opportunity and space to flourish, the tradition as a whole may be in danger of underdevelopment, stagnation, and even decay. In this regard, there is cause for concern in contemporary

Europe, where Christianity, one of the most defining influences of European culture, seems to be facing gradual decay. It is not easy to pinpoint the exact causes of this phenomenon, but perhaps one of them is the lack of adequate and permissible reinterpretations of the tradition (without sacrificing its core elements) which would be more in tandem with the contemporary European *Sitz-im-Leben*. Nietzsche's dictum, “God is dead,” seems to have been a prophetic warning, in this regard, for contemporary European society. For traditional Christian approaches do not seem to sufficiently satisfy the contemporary European soul. In yet another tradition, the disinclination (among many religious leaders and lay faithful) to provide salubrious reinterpretations within Islam to suit modern sensibilities is another serious cause for concern, especially in our times of increasing fundamentalism and religiously-affiliated terrorism.

However, these bleak and dismal facts are neither the only nor the primary reasons why the phenomenon of religious diversity needs to be supported. Rather, a major reason why such a variety of intrareligious discourses needs to be sustained is that each and every discourse, if it is reasonably and responsibly related to the founding vision, values, and goals of the tradition, has the resources *to add meaning and value to the tradition as a whole*. In this regard, perhaps the religion which allows for the most diversity within its folds is Hinduism. In fact, Hinduism is more of a way of life rather than a ‘religion’ understood as a systematic, cohesive organization held together by a common creed, code, and cult. Hinduism has grown more by assimilation of various communities and belief-systems rather than a standardized imposition of core beliefs and customs. The major leitmotif which seems to tie Hinduism together is the social practice of caste (tied in with another core belief in *karma*), rather than any set of dogmatic beliefs. The three legitimate ‘*margas*’ of *jnana*, *bhakti*, and *karma* testify to an underlying plurality that is operative within Hindu consciousness. This plurality perhaps has its extreme philosophical fructification in the Jain epistemological doctrine of ‘*anekantavada*,’ which stresses the perspectival nature of truth. Consequently, it is no wonder that at the practical level Jainism has emphasized ‘*ahimsa*’ or non-violence to an extreme degree, including even vegetative life within the ambit of beings which deserve the right to life.

While Hinduism has given a premium to ideological diversity coupled with social uniformity (especially in terms of caste), Christianity, on the other hand, has given a premium to ideological uniformity (defined

by Magisterial authority) coupled with social diversity. However, even in mainstream Catholicism, which may be perceived to be one of the most centralized, organized, 'hierarchicalized' and conservative religions, there is a plethora of spiritualities and, consequently, communities with quite divergent spiritual visions, values, and goals. The human spirit (influenced by the divine Spirit), it would seem, cannot be restrained by religious boundaries: it seeks to express itself in novel and manifold ways both within and without the great world religions.

But these different religious discourses – especially intrareligious discourses – have numerous opportunities to be intertwined at various forums and, thus, to mutually influence one another. Such mutual interaction and influence may lead to cases of fecund hybridization, leading to newer and more relevant discourse clusters. The example of a 'prophetic-cosmic' discourse cluster arising – among other events – from the recent World Social Forum has already been illustrated. Another more widespread example is that of socially significant projects undertaken by those who subscribe to a dominant 'ascetic' discourse, yet are exposed to, and challenged by other more socially sensitive discourses (e.g., 'prophetic' or 'agapeic' or 'cosmic' discourses). Numerous Catholic priests and nuns have, thus, been engaged in education, healthcare, and social work all over the globe for many centuries and, more recently, Buddhist monks find themselves engaged in political advocacy in South and South East Asia.¹¹ However, in this regard, not all of these mutually influencing relationships among different discourses have proved salubrious. One can call to mind a wide variety of recent events wherein political causes with violent manifestations have been overtly supported and abetted by the clergy of different religious affiliations. We shall now pay attention to this problematic issue of religiously-based violence, examine its conditions and causes, and explore pathways towards its resolution.

¹¹Thich Nath Hanh, a prominent Vietnamese Zen Buddhist, is a good example of a religious leader who advocates political sensitivity and involvement, on the one hand, and religious and spiritual discipline, on the other. An even more famous example is that of the Dalai Lama, whose standoffs with the Chinese government on the issue of religious freedom and human rights in Tibet have commanded sympathetic world attention.

4. Limits to Intrareligious Plurality: The Underlying Unity

While the phenomenon of a variety of intrareligious discourses has its many beneficial features, this phenomenon may also serve to be the condition of disharmony and even violence between some of the different discourses in question. Disharmony and violence are ethical or practical concerns, but they have their origin – partially but significantly – in epistemological presuppositions and assumptions. We shall first pay attention to some of these epistemological considerations governing intrareligious relations before we turn our gaze upon more ethical concerns.

There are four main epistemological positions with respect to reality claims: on the one extreme, there is scepticism, wherein the process of making claims is met with severe doubt, as the conditions for arriving at truth are held to be too demanding or too difficult to fulfil. On the other extreme, there is realism, wherein making claims is governed by bold certitude, because there is judged to be an intuitive correspondence between aspects of reality, on the one hand, and the way these aspects of reality are perceived and claims about them communicated, on the other. In between these two positions, there are two comparatively moderate epistemological positions, viz., relativism and pluralism. Relativism is an offshoot of scepticism with regard to the making of universal claims, but nevertheless allows for personally or community-based constructed truth systems and claims. In the words of Maria Baghramian, “relativism about truth (alethic relativism) is the claim that views and standards of truth and falsity may vary across cultures, social groups, historical periods or even individuals, and every effort to adjudicate them is bound to be futile.”¹² Pluralism is closer to realism, in that it is concerned about making true claims about reality, but nevertheless wants to retain a perspectival understanding of objective reality (based on subjective and community uniqueness). Baghramian contrasts relativism and pluralism in the following manner:

Pluralism ... agrees with relativism on the issue of conceptual diversity but parts company from it by insisting that not only are there limits to the scope of such diversity but also that in many instances we can distinguish between better and worse, or more and less fruitful and productive, conceptual systems. The pluralist, unlike

¹²Maria Baghramian, *Relativism*, London: Routledge, 2004, 121.

the relativist, believes that there are culture-transcendent constraints on what is an acceptable belief- or value-system.¹³

There is, indeed, a need to apply 'culture-transcendent constraints' to conceptual systems and, by extension, to intrareligious discourse systems. Such constraints are especially called for when two types of tyranny are in danger of manifesting themselves in society, viz., the 'tyranny of fundamentalism' and the 'tyranny of relativism'¹⁴ – the former an exaggerated form of realism and the latter an exaggerated form of relativism. These two types of tyranny are also found to be operative in intrareligious relations.

When the 'tyranny of fundamentalism' is operative, a particular ideology and praxis is judged to be the sole and primary discourse form within the tradition. This type of tyranny is at best a nuisance, because it is based on an air of superiority which is incongruous with an increasingly democratic, egalitarian, and culture sensitive world. The relationship between subgroups within any religious tradition that such an attitude generates can only be inimical to harmony and sometimes constitutes the direct cause of religious unrest and violence. But the 'tyranny of relativism' is not less problematic. This may take the form of one group within a religious tradition conducting itself in a manner in which its members are quite unconcerned about other groups. This may be because they find the ideology or the praxis of the other group non-appealing, unconvincing, or not at all religiously normative. This attitude may lead to indifference at the very least, but it may also on occasion generate patterns of domination, subjugation and even attempts at suppression of other subgroups. This is because unequal power relations may sometimes fill in the void created by the lack of any normative theoretical or practical framework to adjudicate between different traditions.¹⁵

¹³Baghramian, *Relativism*, 304-305.

¹⁴This term, "the tyranny of relativism," was made famous by Pope Benedict XVI shortly before his election to the papacy. The then Cardinal Ratzinger used the term primarily in reference to what he perceived as the intellectual malaise of 'postmodernism' which has swept Europe over the past few decades, resulting in a reluctance to commit oneself to, or to recognize the validity of metaphysical and epistemological claims.

¹⁵See Hye-Kyung Kim and Michael Wreen, "Relativism, Absolutism and Tolerance," *Metaphilosophy* 34, 4 (2003), 447-459. The authors argue that there is neither an inductive nor a deductive relationship between relativism and tolerance. They, similarly, argue against an inductive or deductive relationship between

Of the two tyrannies, the tyranny of fundamentalism is easier to comprehend.¹⁶ In a well summarized book on the phenomena of various types of fundamentalism, Steve Bruce gives us a basic definition of the term: “in general, fundamentalisms rest on the claim that some source of ideas, usually a text, is inerrant and complete.”¹⁷ In actual practice, however, what emerge are rival interpretations of what is held to be more sacrosanct or less sacrosanct – i.e., what needs to be taken more literally and less literally – within common revelatory texts. That is why there is so much diversity and so many conflicts among fundamentalist groups inspired by the same scriptures. In this regard, more hierarchically and centrally controlled religions, such as Catholicism, leave less scope for popular and mass fundamentalism. According to Bruce,

Evangelical Protestantism and Islam suppose that authoritative knowledge is democratically available. Any right-spirited person can discern God’s will by reading the scriptures or studying the Qur’ān... [This] is far less so with Catholicism, where access to authoritative religious knowledge is controlled by a centralized bureaucracy.¹⁸

But fundamentalist discourse is not solely restricted to or governed by religious matters. Such discourse is often influenced by a host of social factors, the most significant one being the rise of modernity, and its perception as a challenge to tradition. Modernity has resulted in a vast array of changes which seem inimical to traditional lifestyles and ways of thinking: new market-based economic relations (which, in turn, lead to new class relations), reason rather than tradition as the new social regulator, greater egalitarianism, democratic rather than autocratic processes, greater cultural diversity, new gender roles, etc.¹⁹ Many forms

absolutism and tolerance, though it would seem that this does not require too much demonstration.

¹⁶According to Edward Farley, “the term, fundamentalism, initially described a trans-denominational movement among conservative Protestant Christian groups in the United States which, in the first part of the twentieth century, vigorously and publicly defended biblical inerrancy against historical criticism and biblical geology and cosmology against the theory of evolution.” “Fundamentalism: A Theory,” *Cross Currents* 55, 3 (2005) 378.

¹⁷Steve Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, Cambridge: Polity, 2000, 13.

¹⁸Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, 98-99.

¹⁹See Chapter Two, “Modernity: The Great Satan,” of Bruce, *Fundamentalism*, for an overview of the many reasons why modernity is perceived as a threat to those

of apparently religious fundamentalism are governed more by political and economic interests rather than motivated by purely or even primarily religious interests. However, religiously-veiled fundamentalism continues to manifest itself in various violent forms, the most obvious being the 'Sept 11' (2001) attack in the USA and, closer home, the '26/11' (2008) attack in Mumbai. Fundamentalism is tyrannical not only because it is the seedbed for these overt forms of violence, but more so, because of the widespread reactionary approach to development adopted by various fundamentalist leaders, that too often sanctioned by an assumed divine decree.

In contrast to the tyranny of fundamentalism, the tyranny of relativism is not only more subtle, but also potentially divisive of social forces, based on an insular approach towards the interpretation of reality. Let us turn to a contemporary political manifestation of relativism (encouraged by a sympathetic postmodern hearing) in order to illustrate the potentiality of this type of tyranny. The issue we will briefly consider concerns the validity of the application of human rights across all cultures and nations. In agreement with relativistic and postmodern sentiments – though seemingly largely for political, not for epistemological or ethical reasons – Chinese officials resist the imposition of western standards of civic and political propriety on the Chinese way of life and governance. In response to such a position which appeals to an ideology of cultural relativism (based on a spirit of cultural isolationism and an attitude of cultural superiority not alien to Chinese history), Xiaorong Li comments:

Cultural relativists largely rested their normative claims on the empirical claim that cultural and value diversity exists. But the existence of moral diversity does no more to justify that we ought to respect different moral values than the existence of disease, hunger, torture, slavery²⁰ do to justify that we ought to value them. Empirical claims thus are not suitable as the basis for developing moral principles such as “Never judge other cultures” or “We ought to tolerate different values.” Consequently, if it is proved that China

operating from traditional mindsets. Also, see Farley, “Fundamentalism: A Theory,” where a similar analysis is provided.

²⁰To this list of ‘disease, hunger, torture, slavery’, we could well add ‘terrorism’ as the primary modern malaise which threatens to disrupt the international socio-economic order. What is disconcerting is that terrorism is not just a product of national and cultural (and basically eco-political) interests, but also manifestly religious interests.

had its distinct culture and values, this fact does not entail that such values should not be judged by other cultures and values.²¹

With Li, we feel that it is both possible and necessary to judge other cultures and values (and by extension, other intrareligious discourses). The *possibility* of judging the ‘other’ is based on a claim to the (transcendental) universality of rational consciousness, a claim associated with an *epistemological* position. The *necessity* of judging the ‘other’ arises from a need to redress the conditions for and the actual causes of ‘tyranny’ – a need associated with an *ethical* concern.

The *possibility* of judging the ‘other’ is based on an acceptance of the transcendental nature of human reason – an epistemological position, which has ethical ramifications. If we do not accept this commonness in human nature and rationality, then we may well be in danger of subtly or overtly reinstituting casteist, racist, gender-biased, and cultural prejudices, viz., that one caste, race, gender, or culture is intrinsically superior (i.e., ‘hard-wired’ to be superior) to the other. One does not have to go very far to discover that these types of claims (in all of these areas) and their attendant socio-political consequences have been a part of human history – a part of history which general consensus among those exposed to liberal education processes would judge to be socially deficient in terms of our current perspective. It would seem to be intellectually naïve to want to reinforce these old dysfunctional relations (and to justify them epistemologically), though, of course, at the level of political machinations, such justified inequalities may be considered to be astute or advantageous. Such intellectual and cultural naïveté is, unfortunately, widespread on account of a lack of adequate education and power to question the status quo. Nevertheless, it is precisely the task of philosophy (and of an enlightened theology) to call into question the presuppositions and assumptions upon which such forms of naïveté are based.

The only discourse that can serve to obviate both tyrannies of relativism and fundamentalism is a unitive discourse, based on common principles which would appeal to competing subgroups. These principles could either be found within a common tradition itself, or if this is not possible, within a larger discourse based on transcendental, rational principles of argumentation. But the recourse to this type of rationality is

²¹Xiaorong Li, “Postmodernism and Universal Human Rights: Why Theory and Reality Don’t Mix,” *Free Inquiry* 18, 4 (1998), 31.

not only adopted in order to avoid these two types of tyrannies. Such a transcendental discourse also serves to correct the more serious distortions and dysfunctional elements that may have crept into different religious traditions over time. These distortions and dysfunctional elements also constitute conditions, if not causes for subtle and more manifest forms of intra and inter-group conflicts. This brings us to the *necessity* of judging the 'other.' This necessity is based on the perception of dysfunctional presuppositions and assumptions in the other's social framework which are seen to be harmful for the common good. While it is true that cultural and religious (and sub-cultural and sub-religious) groups give us a sense of identity based on a common narrative and on common ideological and practical principles, it is also true that these narratives and these ideologies and practical principles are not without their faults and anachronisms. Thus, it is that, in response to this social characteristic of a community-based narrative identity, Paul Ricoeur asks: "Why move from teleology to deontology? And where? I suggest a basic and massive answer: there is *morality*, in the sense of moral obligation, because there is *violence* ... because violence is evil, and evil is what *is* and what *ought not* to be."²² One needs to move from a teleological perspective (based on what is considered to be 'good') to a deontological perspective (based on what is considered to be 'right'), in order to correct such deficient ideologies and malpractices.

There are many avenues which one may pursue in this desire to factor in a deontological moment into cultural and religious development. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was an attempt at a consensual formulation of rules and guidelines which would place limits to regional socio-political narratives and their interpretation of how human life is to be valued. It was partly as a development of these UN guidelines that the 'Parliament of the World's Religions' in Chicago (1993) initiated the 'Global Ethic' project. However, it was felt that a declaration of political rights without an ethical basis would not provide sufficient and appropriate motivation to work towards providing and sustaining human dignity. Hence, the 'Global Ethic' project aims at the formulation of basic principles and guidelines culled from different religious traditions. The "Declaration toward a Global Ethic" states:

²²Paul Ricoeur, "The Teleological and Deontological Structures of Action: Aristotle and/or Kant?" in *Contemporary French Philosophy*, ed. A. Phillips Griffiths, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 106, original italics.

By a global ethic we do not mean a global ideology or a single unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one religion over all others. By a global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes.²³

Such a ‘fundamental consensus’ is more easily workable within a religious tradition itself, because though what is ‘good’ is largely and loosely held to be in common, what is the ‘right’ means towards this good may often be in dispute. However, many conflicts are not merely restricted to the boundaries of any given religion, but affect others as well, e.g., in contemporary forms of religiously-inspired terrorism. In such cases, when there are many communities affected, both ‘good’ ends and ‘right’ means may be in dispute. It is especially at these moments that any critique of violence needs to transcend narrow narrative conceptions of the ‘good’ and to enter into the deontological domain of the ‘right.’

It is expedient to explore right-based or deontological discourse within the religious traditions themselves. This is not an impossible task, as some form of the ‘Golden Rule’ (with both its positive and negative formulations)²⁴ and its many applications feature in most religious literature. Even in a purely philosophical work such as Paul Ricoeur’s mini-ethics in *Oneself as Another*, where he contrasts the ethical foundation of social life, characterized by teleological and narrative unity, with moral reflection, characterized by universal and deontological reflection, he ultimately plumbs for the ‘Golden Rule’ as a sound deontological principle which would provide this moral dimension to practical life.²⁵ If the ‘Golden Rule’ as a sound moral principle makes sense within the secular and philosophical domain, it will more easily be

²³Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel, eds., *A Global Ethic*, London: SCM Press, 1993, 21, as quoted in Michael Amaladoss, “A Global Ethic for Global Peace? Reflections from Indian Perspectives” in *Pilgrims in Dialogue: A New Configuration of Religions for Millennium Christianity*, ed. Antony Kalliath, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2000, 53.

²⁴“Do to others what you would like them to do to you,” and “Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you.”

²⁵See Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. See also Alan Donagan, *The Theory of Morality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977, for a focus on the Golden Rule as a means towards the formulation of a deontological ethical principle.

located within religiously-based moral discourse, with its many narratives, wisdom sayings, and interdictions.

Another attempt at a consensus methodology based on deontological principles and processes is the 'discourse ethics' of Jürgen Habermas. Unlike an insular Kantian (or even Ricoeurian) approach, Habermas' ethical procedure involves a dialogical process aimed at inter-subjective and collective consensus. One of the primary principles of 'discourse ethics' reads: "only those norms may claim to be valid that could meet with the approval of all those affected in their capacity as participants in practical discourse."²⁶ Furthermore, specific contexts and consequences have to be taken into consideration: "For a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects of its general observance for the satisfaction of each person's particular interests must be acceptable to all."²⁷ These conditions and regulations may seem to be very idealistic, but in practice, the process of the formulation of the "Declaration of Human Rights" and the "Global Ethic Project" of the Parliament of World's Religions are good examples of arriving at consensus on deontological themes which transcend narrow understandings of the 'good'.

This type of unitive and deontological discourse (reason and 'right'-focused, rather than narrative and 'good'-focused) does not preclude a pluralist ethical approach towards practical life. That is, while there is a common rationality which unites humankind, this common rationality is capable of giving rise to numerous 'forms of life', but forms of life which have porous rather than rigid boundaries – to use a Wittgensteinian term and, at the same time, to distance oneself from its narrow or insular interpretation.

In this section, we have not focused as much on *theoria* as much as on *praxis*. We are not merely interested in the justification of the validity of religious claims on theoretical grounds, but rather on practical grounds: negatively, the grounds or conditions which may lead to social disharmony and violence, and positively, the grounds or conditions which may better create dialogue, better understanding, mutual fecundity, and, ultimately, more easily lead to social and religious progress. It is to this last concern that we shall now pay attention, viz., the creation of adequate conditions

²⁶Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. C. Lenhardt and S. Nicholsen, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990, 66.

²⁷Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 197.

for the sustenance of plural discourse and the limitations to such discourses whenever warranted.

5. Intrareligious Dialogue to Sustain Plurality and Unity

We have argued that it is necessary and salubrious to sustain both a plurality of intrareligious discourses and a unity that binds them together. We now propose the unique discourse form of intrareligious dialogue as a concrete and primary strategy which would enable an enhancement of positive relations between believers who subscribe to different discourses and discourse clusters. Even in contemporary socio-political approaches towards ‘multiculturalism’, dialogue between different religious believers is not something to be avoided, but instead something to be fostered. In the words of Ernst Ballin, “multiculturalism with the covert message that religion is a private matter that we had better keep silent about in public is therefore not all that tolerant. It excludes the deepest motives of the encounter between the various communities that make up a society. In contrast, interreligious dialogue requires respectful openheartedness.”²⁸ Such an encounter based on ‘respectful openheartedness’ is not only useful for learning about and from one another’s communities and traditions, but also that we may be able to mutually challenge and propose changes in the way we interpret our traditions for contemporary situations. However, for such mutual learning and correction to take place, there need to be suitable *conditions* of dialogue which make these processes both possible and reasonable. In the words of Michael Barnes, “dialogue is less about debating truth-claims than about creating the conditions within which the *questions themselves* can be heard and understood.”²⁹

Catherine Cornille outlines basic epistemological, psychological, and doctrinal conditions for dialogue between religions – conditions which may be considered to be equally significant in the area of intrareligious

²⁸Ernst M. H. Hirsch Ballin, “Human Rights” in Christiane Timmerman and Barbara Segaeert, eds., *How to Conquer the Barriers to Intercultural Dialogue*, Brussels: Peter Lang, 2005, 159.

²⁹Michael Barnes, “Christian Faith in a Pluralist World,” in Timmerman and Segaeert, eds., *How to Conquer the Barriers to Intercultural Dialogue*, 61 (original italics). This article of Barnes is one among an interesting collection of articles, wherein the nature and possibility of such conditions are explored, especially from theological and sociological perspectives.

dialogue.³⁰ First of all, at the *epistemological* level, we need to have the ability to understand the other's perspective without abandoning one's own:

It is possible to reconstruct and understand other conceptions of ultimate reality in a sense that can at least resonate with the understanding of the believers themselves... [S]emantic connections may be established between different symbols which would then form the bridge for further analogical understanding.³¹

Secondly, at the *psychological* level, Cornille precludes “a total commitment to one's own conception of God and a total openness to that of the other,”³² even though this approach seems attractive and magnanimous. Rather, a more reasonable dialogical position she advocates is one wherein, “within the commitment to a particular tradition a certain openness to the other is required, while in the openness to the other a firm rootedness in a particular conception of the ultimate reality is necessary.”³³ Such an approach requires a certain psychological maturity – a maturity that is characterized by a sense of security and confidence in one's beliefs and convictions, without feeling threatened by the beliefs and convictions of the ‘other’. For Jacques Waardenburg, these forms of subtle and overt aggression are rooted, among other things, in

mental weakness (*sic*). I refer to subservience to fixed traditions and absolutized truths, self-defence against what is felt to be different and foreign, and closing oneself off from what is beyond the horizon. I also refer to attempts at intellectual domination ... glorifying one's own exclusivity, instead of accepting other ways of life and recognizing that they have analogous claims to existence.³⁴

Quite often, such ‘mental weakness’ (or psychological and sociological immaturity) stems from “sheer ignorance, refusal of education, and lack of simple reasoning ... no idea of the presence of other life values, no interest in past or present-day other cultures, and ultimately no trust in other

³⁰See Catherine Cornille, “Conditions for the Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue” in Timmerman and Segaert, eds., *How to Conquer the Barriers to Intercultural Dialogue*, 25-42.

³¹Cornille, “Conditions for the Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,” 40.

³²Cornille, “Conditions for the Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,” 40

³³Cornille, “Conditions for the Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,” 40.

³⁴Jacques Waardenburg, “Religious Identity and Intercultural Dialogue” in Timmerman and Segaert, eds., *How to Conquer the Barriers to Intercultural Dialogue*, 186.

people.”³⁵ Such relationships – insular at best and dominating at worst – are unfortunately characteristic of much of interreligious and intrareligious equations over the centuries. Quite often, the attitudes at the basis of these relationships are so stubborn and entrenched, that not even the many technological and social advances of modernity can succeed in substantially eclipsing their existence.

Finally, for Cornille, at the *doctrinal* level, there needs to be a “fundamental belief in the unity of all truth ... the conviction that this truth may actually manifest itself in new and unexpected ways in and through the other religion... [T]he elements of truth recognized in the other religion will never be completely discontinuous with one’s own conception of truth.”³⁶ Indeed, within the same religion, the task of finding ‘continuity’ with other discourses or discourse-clusters is comparatively easier. Cornille concludes her essay by asserting that “the other will be regarded as a competitor and an enemy until all of the conditions are fulfilled for a genuinely religious dialogue. If the fulfilment of these conditions has become possible in Christianity, which has, after all, been called the most imperialistic and exclusivistic of religions, it must be possible in all religions.”³⁷

Jacques Waardenburg adds an important *material* (eco-political) condition to this list of conditions for dialogue – a condition which has more to do with power equations between different communities of discourse rather than purely epistemological, psychological, and doctrinal considerations.³⁸ Similarly, for Francis Houtart, an important condition “is the existence of a *similar social status*. If one religious group claims and enjoys a privileged status in society, dialogue is very difficult.”³⁹ There are many elements which go to comprise social status, but economic and

³⁵Cornille, “Conditions for the Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,” 40.

³⁶Cornille, “Conditions for the Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,” 41.

³⁷Cornille, “Conditions for the Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue,” 42.

Cornille does not mention the source of this contentious allegation at the end of the quotation, but there is no doubt that over the past few decades, mainline Christian communities seem to have learned much from past experiences of relationships characterized by different forms of alienation with regard to other religious communities, and have now somewhat reversed this process, instead investing much energy in constructive processes of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

³⁸See Waardenburg, “Religious Identity and Intercultural Dialogue,” 186.

³⁹Francois Houtart, “Religious Identity” in Timmerman and Segaeert, eds., *How to Conquer the Barriers to Intercultural Dialogue*, 114, italics added.

political power, access to higher education and cultural and global exposure are some of the defining features of higher forms of social status. Often the bestowing of a high form of social status towards one religious discourse goes along with the downplaying of competing discourses. Some of these methods of downplaying include shaming strategies, the creation of guilt in the adherents of the other discourses, forbidding self and community expression in ideology and praxis by members of the other discourse communities, etc. Gerald Arbuckle illustratively highlights strategies of gossip, shame (the creation of guilt and the diminishing of one's honour or reputation), and humour (ridicule) as mechanisms of violence, which tend to create a hierarchy of discourses in favour of one's own.⁴⁰ Houtart adds that another condition in order to ensure good relations between different communities "is a secular State, as it is *the only way* to create genuine cultural pluralism."⁴¹ This is sometimes sadly true for interreligious relations and, ever worse, for relations between different religious communities within the same mother tradition (e.g., Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, and Sunnis and Shias in Iraq).

There is no doubt that at some point in the development of any religious tradition, certain discourses or clusters of discourses are invested with more power than other discourses.⁴² The nobility and stature of any such intrareligious discourse are reflected precisely at these high points of eco-political power, when the discourse in question can use its power to dominate and subjugate other discourses, either overtly or covertly, often in the name of assumedly religious interests. A well known example of this in the Christian tradition is the period of the 'Inquisition', when fear and terror were some of the means employed towards doctrinal education, rather than pastoral and spiritual concern. Another more contemporary example is Wahhabi Islamic discourse (sanctioned by political patronage), which seems to be instilling a similar fear and conformity among the

⁴⁰See Chapter Four of Gerald Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach*, Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004.

⁴¹Francis Houtart, "Religious Identity" in Timmerman and Segart, eds., *How to Conquer the Barriers to Intercultural Dialogue*, 114, italics added.

⁴²Perhaps more than any other contemporary philosopher who has identified themes governing discourse with power equations is Michel Foucault. One may not entirely agree with Foucault's reductionist and determinist analyses of discourse structures and patterns, but one cannot deny that nuances of a Nietzschean 'will to power' – pivotal to Foucault's reflection on this theme – may often be subliminally and even overtly operative in intrareligious relations.

faithful, not only in doctrinal matters but even in practical and cultural affairs. There are, indeed, numerous instances and examples of insalubrious and counterproductive conditions which often serve to create division rather than harmony among different interreligious and intrareligious discourses. Gerald Arbuckle makes a systematic study of this in *Violence, Society and the Church: A Cultural Approach*, an analysis that could as well be applied to other religions besides Christianity. According to Arbuckle, “processes in a culture which foster or allow people to be violent are to be found ultimately in its symbols, myths and rituals,”⁴³ i.e., cultural aspects foundational to any given intrareligious discourse. Arbuckle goes on to enunciate a few operative axioms which form the basis of violence.⁴⁴ A few of these axioms are very illustrative from the point of view of conflict situations between different discourses within the same religion: Axiom 1: “*Groups see their culture as “clean” or “pure” and others as “dirty” or “impure,” and therefore dangerous – to be avoided, changed or eliminated.*”⁴⁵ Axiom 3 reads: “cultures have an in-built resistance to change, and this can lead to violence against people or groups who advocate change. Cultures serve as defences against individual and group anxiety.”⁴⁶ Axiom 5 states: “Bullying is more likely to occur in hierarchical cultures than in cultures with a mythology of collaboration.”⁴⁷ These and other operative presuppositions and assumptions are fertile grounds for intrareligious and interreligious disharmony.

However, Arbuckle optimistically concludes his book by illustrating key features of ‘para-modernity’ (a new paradigm of social consciousness beyond both modernity and post-modernity) as possibly a new primary set of conditions best suited to create a mindset open towards and ready to sustain a plurality of discourse. Key features of ‘para-modernity’ include “respect for the person and cultural identity, interdependence, systems, collaboration, holistic health, imagination, spirituality, gender equality, accountability, reconciliation, and nonviolence. These are ‘signals of transcendence’ in a world where violence is frequently assumed to be

⁴³ Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church*, 15.

⁴⁴ Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church*, 15-27.

⁴⁵ Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church*, 15, original italics.

⁴⁶ Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church*, 18.

⁴⁷ Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church*, 23.

normal.”⁴⁸ What is clear in such a ‘para-modern’ paradigm is that there is a need to sustain both plurality and unity of cultural discourses and, in the context of our reflection, intrareligious discourses. While a ‘pre-modern’ consciousness would result in a naïve approach towards other discourses, a ‘modern’ consciousness would likely introduce ‘master-slave’ dynamics into intercultural and interreligious relations, and a ‘postmodern’ consciousness would be satisfied with assuming a relativistic position – a position which does not preclude violence, as we have observed. The need of the hour is to work out various forms of human relationships between and within religions which can tie into significant elements of what Arbuckle has identified as a ‘para-modern’ consciousness. Such a consciousness would give rise to many processes necessary for healthy intrareligious discourse: embracing risk and trust in order to overcome fear of the ‘other’ and of the future, respecting and being open to other discourses based on a spirit of egalitarianism rather than patterns of domination, learning from one another rather than operating from insularity and superiority, and addressing violent interpretations and actions together in order to create a safer and more harmonious world.

6. Conclusion

We began by highlighting different nuances prevalent within religious discourse. Religions are not uniform belief or practical systems with all adherents abiding by the same norms or inspired by the same concerns. In fact, in every religious tradition, there will be individuals and communities who engage in quite different forms of discourse (or discourse-clusters) within the tradition itself. I have highlighted about a dozen of the more outstanding types of these discourses in the first part of the paper. In the second part, I have attempted to argue that this diversity within religious discourse should be sustained, for three primary reasons. Firstly, in order to provide the space for new discourses and interpretations to arise, especially when some of these are attempts to correct and purify the religion from accumulated aberrations and misinterpretations over time. Secondly, because diversity brings richness of meaning and value to any religion, as well as an opportunity for the human spirit to find expression in a variety of forms. Finally, in order that different discourses may mutually influence one another, both learn and teach from one another and both correct and be corrected by one another as an ongoing process. In the

⁴⁸Arbuckle, *Violence, Society and the Church*, 238.

third part, I have focused on violent manifestations of religious discourse. Two forms of violence I have especially focused upon are the ‘tyranny of fundamentalism’ and the ‘tyranny of relativism’. Both of these types of tyranny (and other forms of violence) need to be countered by recourse to transcendental or universal rational argumentation – a form of deontological reasoning that goes beyond a person’s or his/her discourse-community’s narrative identity and somewhat narrow outlook on life. Finally, in the last part, I have proposed that the avenue of dialogue between different discourses be diligently pursued. Dialogue is a useful means not only to learn from and contribute towards the wealth of other discourses, but also to establish a common ground of discourse in order to address violent interpretations and actions. In this regard, I have outlined major conditions which can further such dialogue and the counterproductive conditions which serve as hindrance or obstacle to dialogue. When these and other negative conditions are overcome and more healthy conditions are created, we will be able to celebrate the plurality and the unity within intrareligious discourse and within religious discourse in general.