

EDUCATING AGAINST EXTREMISM

Lynn Davies

Can interreligious education help counter the rise and spread of religious extremism?

Current urgencies

- Preventing young people **joining or supporting** extremist movements and their actions
- **Deradicalisation** and reintegration of extremists or fighters
- **Community cohesion**: resilience to both religious and far right propagandists; avoiding retaliation

Opportunities in inter-religious dialogue

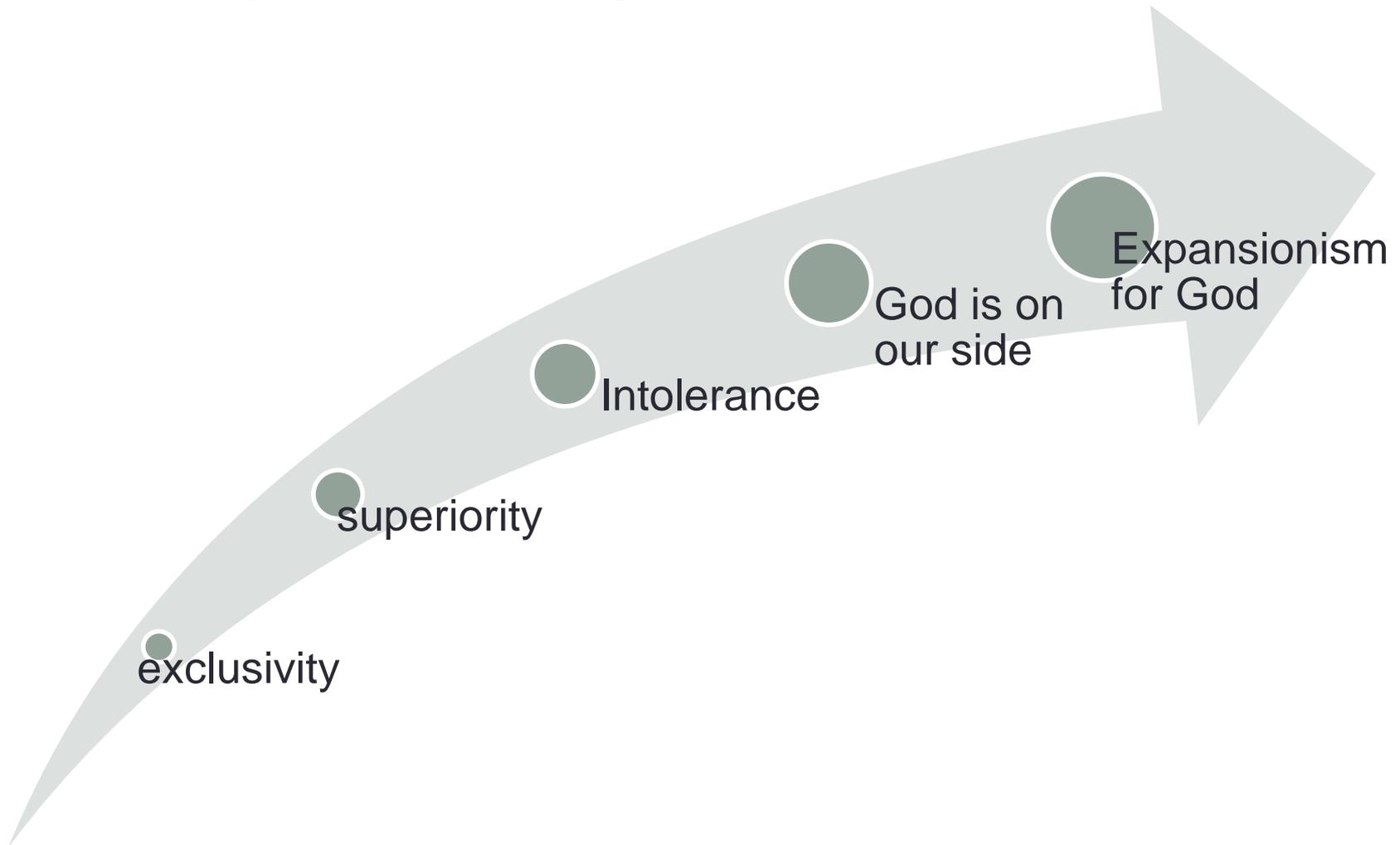
- Awareness of **commonalities**, shared humanity, goals
- Awareness of shared **fears** and vulnerabilities
- Awareness of **hybridities** in religion and citizenship (e.g. Anglo-Indian Christian, secular Jew, British Muslim)

Therefore, awareness of **complexity** in oneself and others rather than the absolutes which make people vulnerable to extremist ideology.

Risks in interreligious dialogue and education

- **‘Othering’**, stereotyping, simplistic ideas about ‘other’ faiths and their holders
- **‘Respect for diversity’** interpreted as acceptance of all cultural practices, including FGM, honour killings, secondary status of women, the need for revenge
- **Community ‘representatives’** engage in the dialogue but there is no trickle down
- **Hypocrisy**: pretence (especially in faith schools) that all faiths are equal

Why religion is particularly risky in conflict: the amplification spiral



Formers and Families project

- Research on former extremists reveals no single causal patterns or linear pathways, and that neither the childhood family nor education is predictive
- Church/mosque not protective
- Deradicalisation a mix of maturity, unease at violence, awareness of complexity, anger at being manipulated, feeling betrayed, becoming a parent, different sorts of reading and study

Three global citizenship imperatives

1. Not inter-religious but intra-religious dialogue
2. Understanding of secularism
3. Critical political education

1. Intra-religious education

- Dialogue **within** a faith and between all the various sects, cults, branches, value systems
- Critical analysis of mistakes made and human rights violations legitimised in the name of religion
- Critical analysis of sacred texts to question the more violent or misogynistic parts

Zehavit Gross Lynn Davies
Al-Khansaa Diab *Editors*

**Gender, Religion
and Education
in a Chaotic
Postmodern World**

Springer

2. Understanding of secularism

- (Dynamic) secularism is the best container for religious extremism
- Not the same as atheism (secularism is a system of governance, not a belief system)
- It has a moral code, in the need for the rule of law and protection of human rights for all
- Many religious groups support secularism (e.g. *British Muslims for a Secular Democracy*) because they know it protects their (and others') religion.

Unsafe Gods

Security, secularism and schooling



LYNN DAVIES

Dynamic secularism: 10 features

1. A diversity of religious beliefs and lifestyle choices is seen as productive for development and social evolution
2. Religious belief, membership or identity are not elevated above any other ethical system, political movement or cultural grouping
3. Religious organisations are subject to the same laws as everyone else; no immunity
4. There is no discrimination on the grounds of religion in citizenship rights or duties
5. There is freedom to hold a belief and to leave it, and to reject all religions

Dynamic secularism....

6. There is freedom of religious expression (as long as this does not harm others)
7. There is freedom to challenge religion: critiquing or satirizing a religion is the same as critiquing or satirizing political, economic, environmental or any other way of seeing the world. There is no right not to be offended.
8. Religious associations are accepted, can lobby and can be consulted, but there is no official representation in the machinery of governance
9. Religions compete in the marketplace for influence with other vested interests
10. Accommodation to religious belief can occur if it does no harm to others, makes no difference or is within law and rights

3. Critical political education

- Creating **change without violence**
- **Channelling** idealism into localised campaigns, actions or volunteering. **Achievable targets:** not '*Join the world-wide movement against globalisation*'....
- **Joint** movements where faith, ethnicity etc is 'forgotten' in pursuit of an aim and common identity
- **Skills** in strategy, networking, financing, recruitment, democratic processes, legal limits of civil disobedience
- **Teachers as role models** in social movements

- **Key citizen skill:** understandings of rights and responsibilities around freedom of speech; equality of respect for beliefs, if not necessarily for actions

The power and limits of freedom of expression

NOT



BUT

- Knowledge of equal rights - to freedom of expression; but that there is no right not to be offended
- Understanding free speech, not hate speech
- Resilience to 'offence'
- Awareness of the value of satire in a democracy, as well as risks
- Skills in counter-messaging