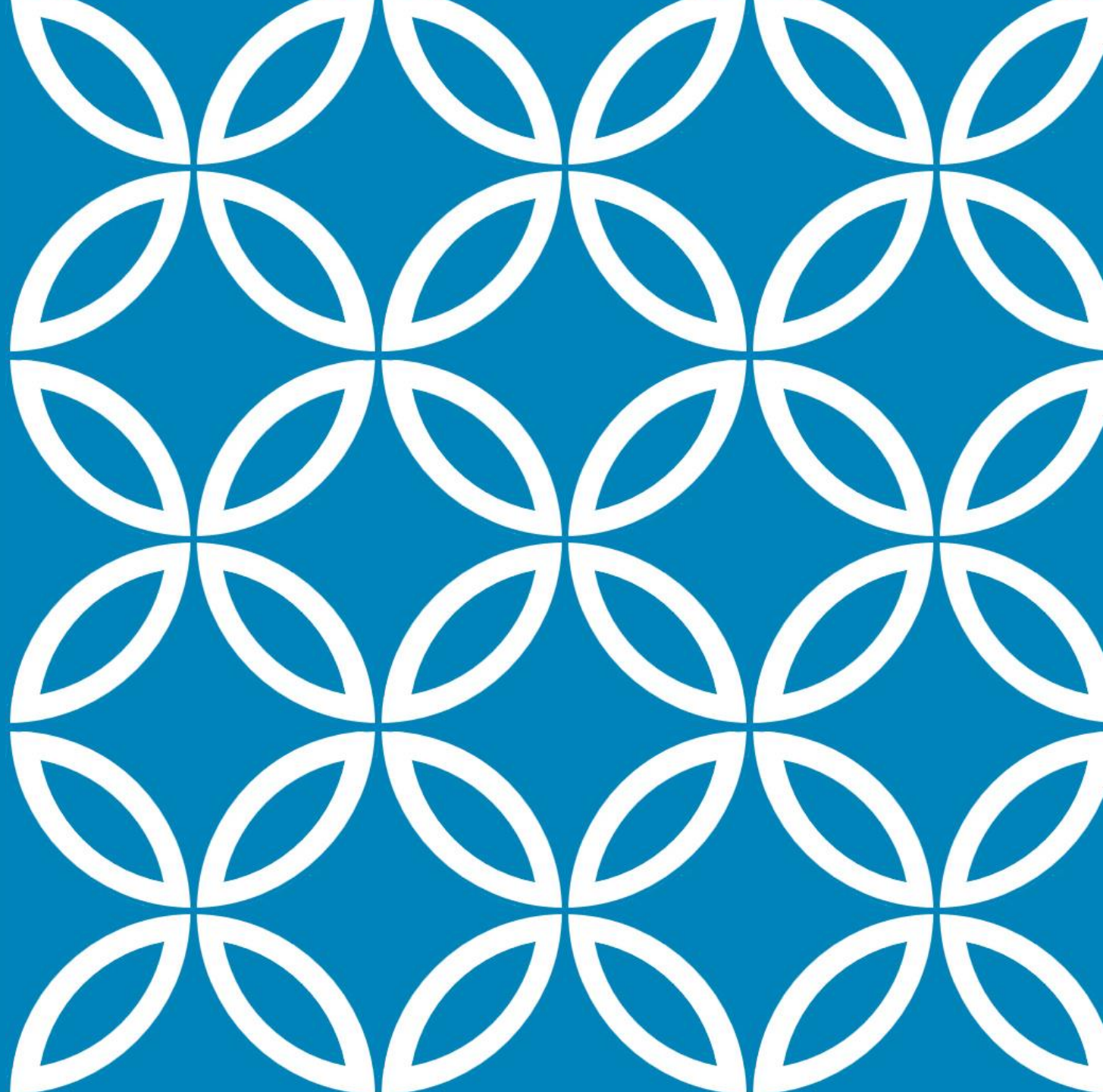
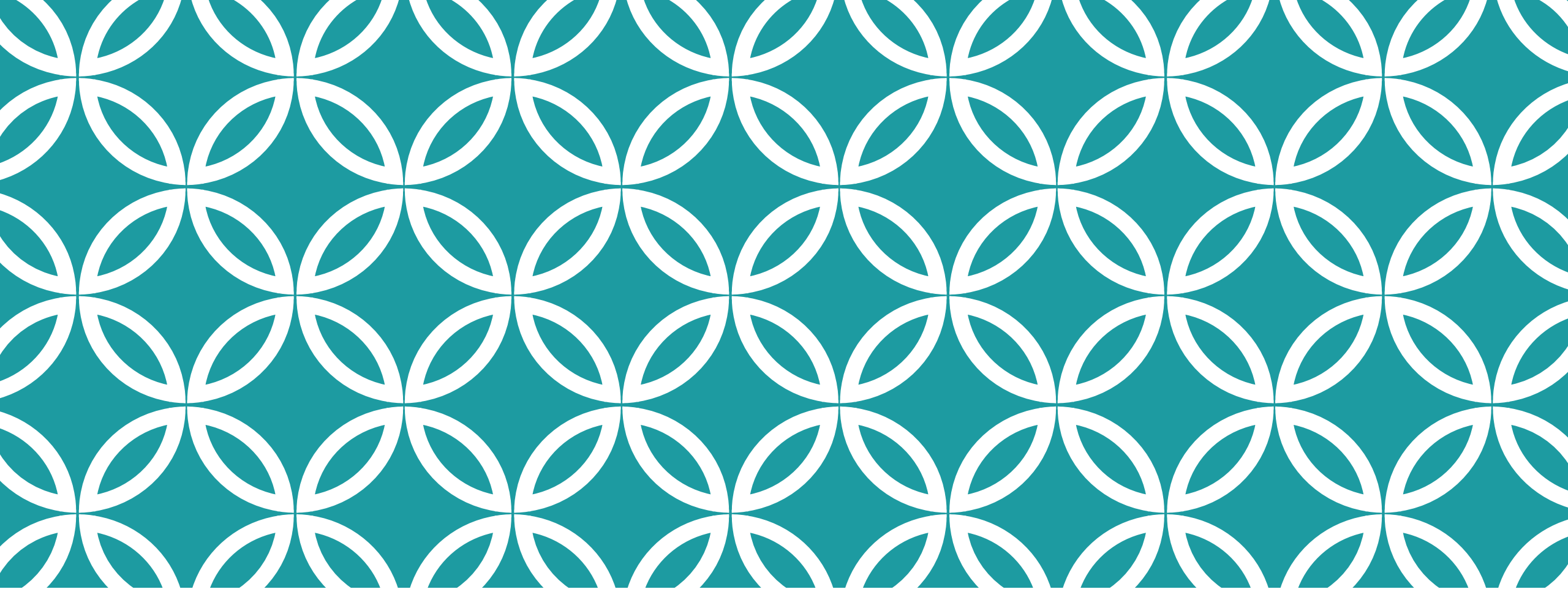


METHODS AND APPROACHES IN INTERFAITH STUDIES

Dr Angus M Slater





THE TYPOLOGY OF THE THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS





REVISION

In the last section, we examined the rough outline of the third major position within the Theology of Religions, Pluralism.

As we have hopefully seen, pluralism is difficult to define, with many different approaches being apparent. All, however, posit a shared or joint possibility of salvation within alternative religious traditions, however this notion of salvation may be defined. We examined a number of prominent scholars of pluralism, each with their own distinct approach.

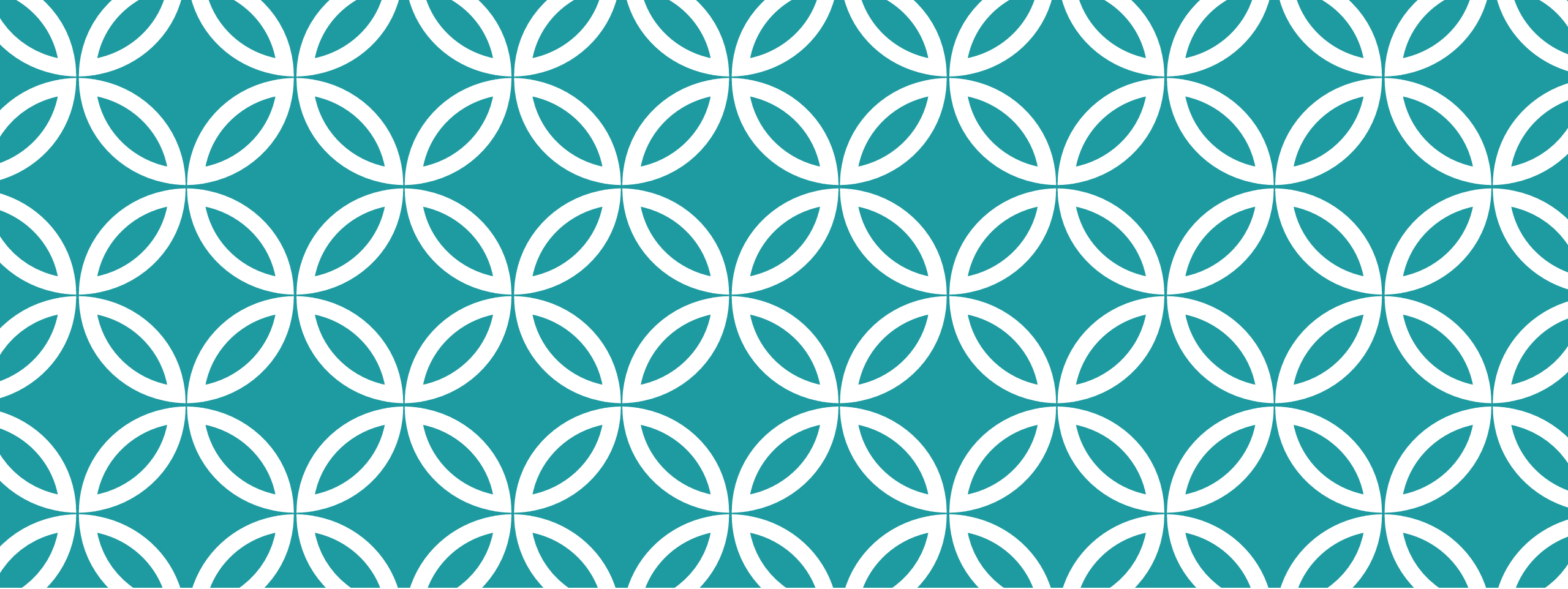


REVISION

You also had four readings to complete (Pannenberg, D'Costa, Heim, & Fegert) which attempted to explore the position of Exclusivism in more depth.

Two of the readings (Pannenberg and Fegert) directly engaged with the position of pluralism, while the other two (Heim and Fegert) offered a more in depth look at one particular form of pluralist positioning.

Make sure that you engage with the discussion forums on Moodle and offer up a question for reflection for the group.



CRITIQUES OF THE TYPOLOGY



CRITIQUES OF THE TYPOLOGY

As we have seen in the preceding sections, the typology has informed a great deal of contemporary discussion of interfaith matters and each position has developed as these discussion have gone on.

In addition, each position has developed and interacted with each other, offering numerous critiques of all three of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.

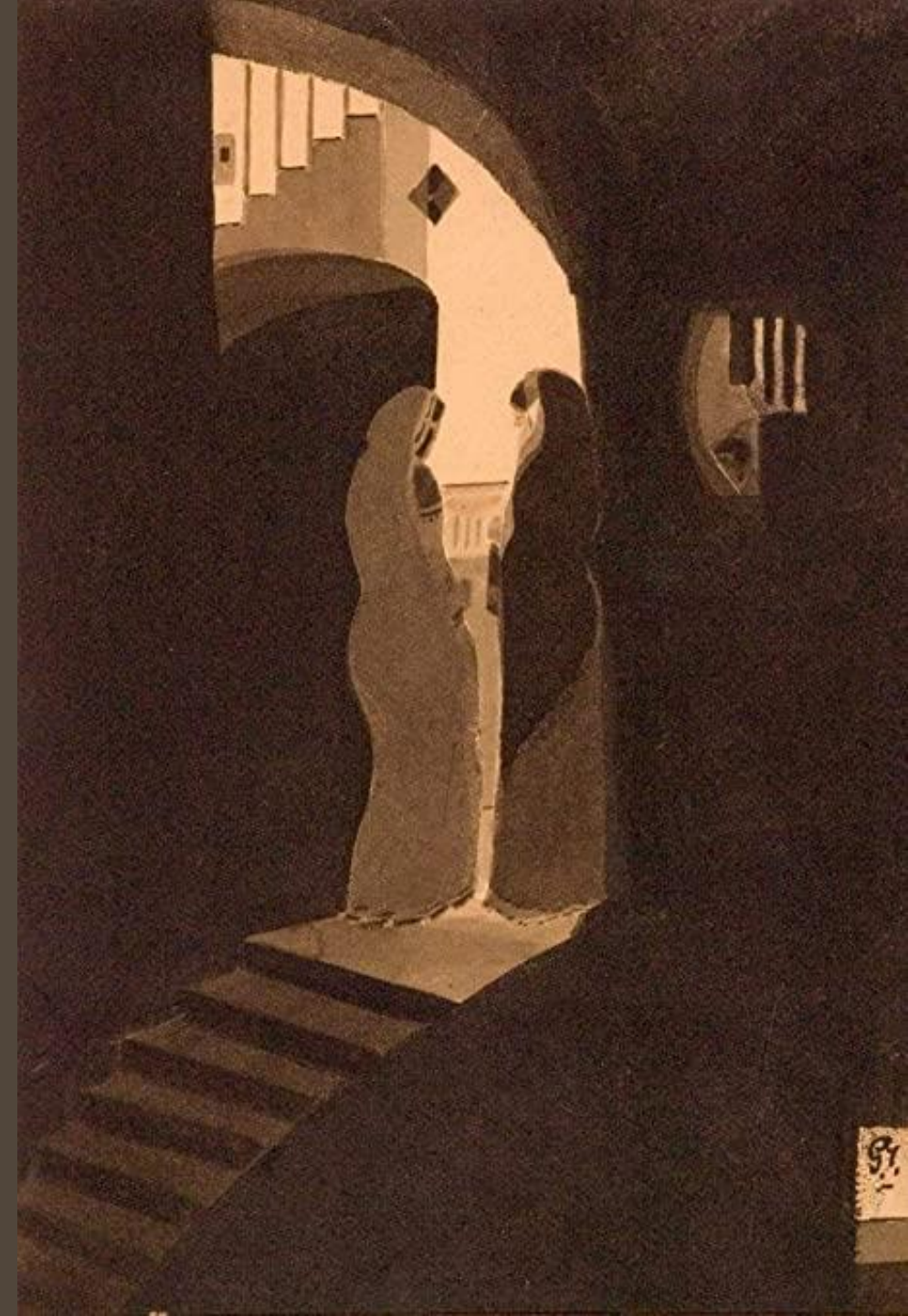
Exclusivists have critiqued inclusivists and pluralists, inclusivists have critiqued exclusivists and pluralists, and, of course, pluralists have critiqued exclusivists and inclusivists.



CRITIQUES OF THE TYPOLOGY

These intra-typology critiques are not the only places where the assumptions of the theology of religions are subject to criticism.

In this section, I want to turn our attention to two particular critiques of the typology as a whole, the concept of particularism and the difficulties of the typology for other religions, before setting you off on some reading preparation for your first assessment, which you should be beginning to think about.

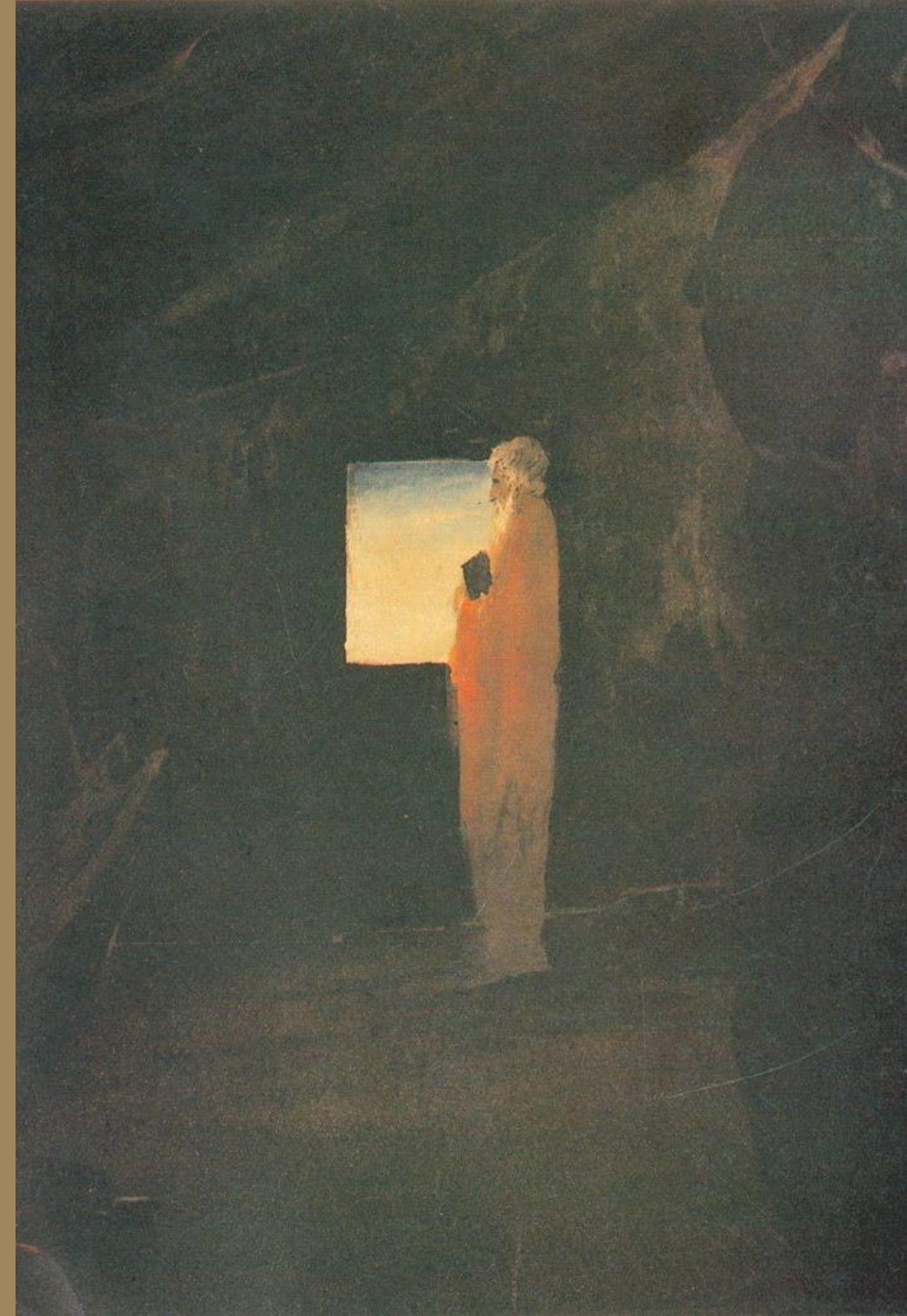


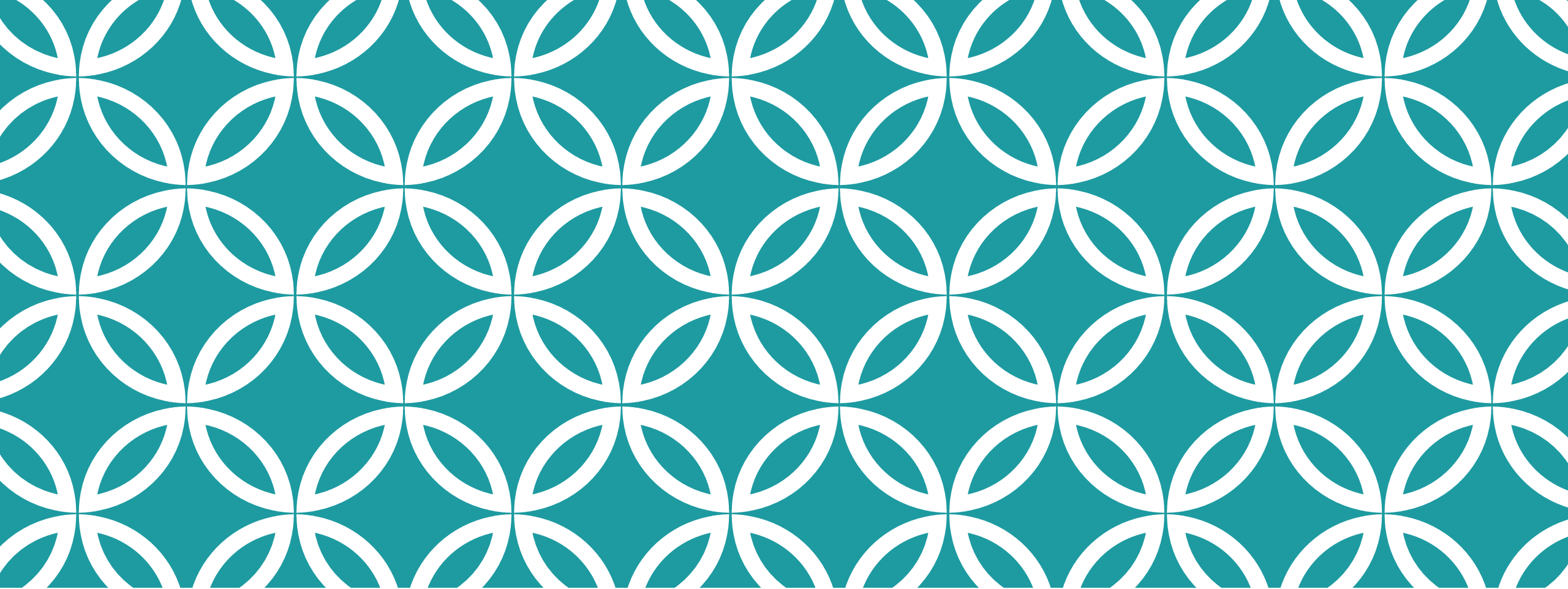
CRITIQUES OF THE TYPOLOGY

This preparatory reading is important as it will give you the foundations of your essay answer and allow you to explore beyond the bounds of the lectures provided.

This self-development is a critical part of your growth as independent scholars and a vital skill for your journey through postgraduate study.

We will have a similar section for the second assessment too.





PARTICULARISM





PARTICULARISM

Particularism is an odd beast that is sometimes presented as a position within the typology (being a form of exclusivism), or as being another form of response (which can be added to the typology as a fourth category), or sometimes as a rejection / critique of the entire typology.

I have chosen to present it here as a critique of the entire typology, because I feel that best represents the force and nature of the particularist critique as a whole, which applies well beyond the confines of just the theology of religions.

Other scholars you may come across in discussions of particularism may have different opinions about the best location for it in this discussion!



PARTICULARISM

Particularism is the general belief that the various religious traditions are *particular*.

In theology talk, this means that they represent specific, non-comparable, and non-relatable things e.g. their stories are *particular* to them.

For example, a particularist may point out that the differing religious traditions all inhabit differently constructed social realities, which give rise to differentiated meaning, which give rise to fundamentally different accounts of reality. This is the Wittgensteinian position we examined in an earlier section.



PARTICULARISM

Religions, because of their roots in historical and cultural backgrounds are VERY particular – they use their interconnected internal semiotic connections to attempt to describe and explain the whole of reality.

When differing religions talk about aspects of their faith, they are talking about different things – when Christians talk about salvation, this is not the same as Buddhists and moksha; when Muslims talk about love, this will not necessarily have the same features as Sikhs talking about love.

This is because the cultural contexts which explain the meaning of things differs so much from tradition to tradition, and do not necessarily rely on the same markers of meaning.

PARTICULARISM

For Particularists, we have to respect that difference as much as possible, and allow these differences between religious conceptions of things to exist. This is why particularism is sometimes seen as a critique of pluralism, which presumes similarity, and as a form of exclusivism, which supposes uniqueness and individuality.

Of course, if religions are all talking about different things, that only make sense within their own contexts, then the only way to engage with other religions is from an internal perspective – an attempted explanation of ourselves, but with little prospect of real understanding.



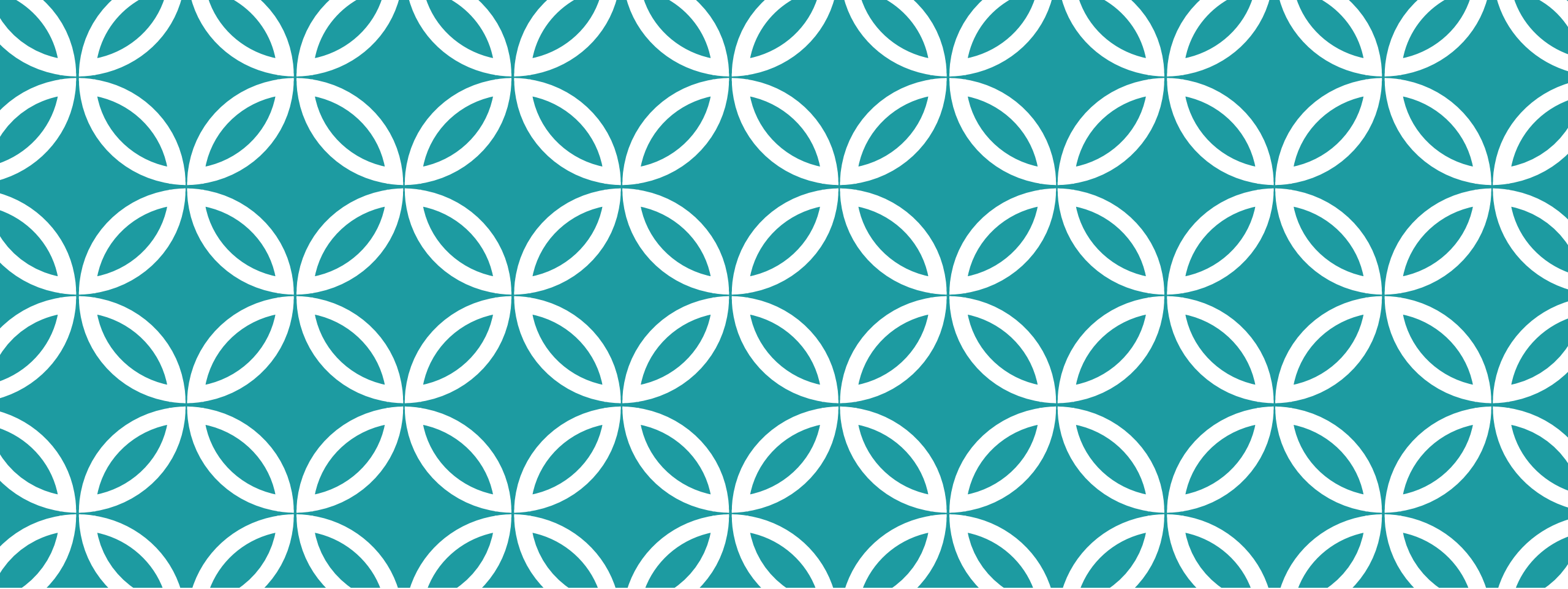
PARTICULARISM

The critique of particularism can seem quite trite, being simplified as “things are too difficult”, but this misrepresents the subtlety of the position and its relation to broader philosophical and conceptual issues.

Particularism is interesting as a position for us, because it connects much of the content we have looked at in the preceding sections on topics like post-modernism and the typology of the theology of religions.

It also functions effectively as a critique of the way in which we conceptualise dialogue and language, connecting to some of the linguistic issues we looked at earlier.





THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS



THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

The second broad critique I want us to address in this section (before you examine some more specific criticisms in the readings!) is the applicability of the typology to other religious contexts.

Often, the typology has been applied to other religious contexts, attempting to understand either their place within it from a Christian perspective, or attempting to understand their responses to alternative religious traditions within its categories.

This has been done well, but it is also often done badly...

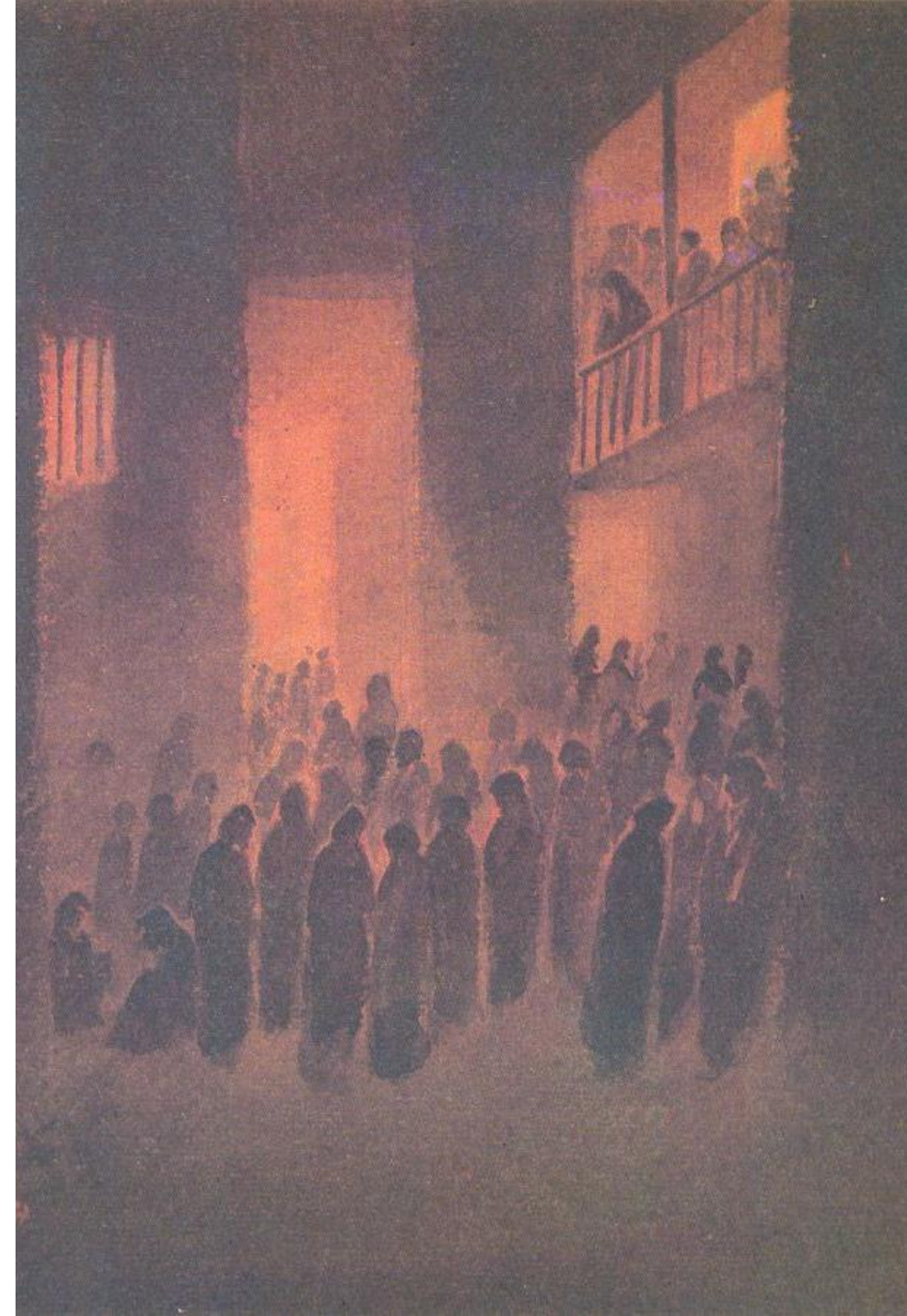


THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

Obviously, this application of the typology is done because other religions (and not just Christianity) have had to react to the presence, and continuation, of religious plurality.

Differing religions naturally have different concerns and approach the matter in different ways, with differing stresses depending on the central concerns of that tradition.

The typology helps us to sort and make sense of these differing responses in a way that is familiar.



THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

This use is perhaps most useful when it comes to evaluating the truth, either of their own tradition or others, as most religious answers can be seen to fall within one of the answers available to the typology.

That is, when asked, ‘do other religions contain truth?’, answers tend towards yes, no, or maybe.

Of course these answers are specific – the answers given, while generally presented as the “traditional” answer, do not necessarily cover the variety of responses within the tradition and these answers often draw on different sources and locations within those traditions.



THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

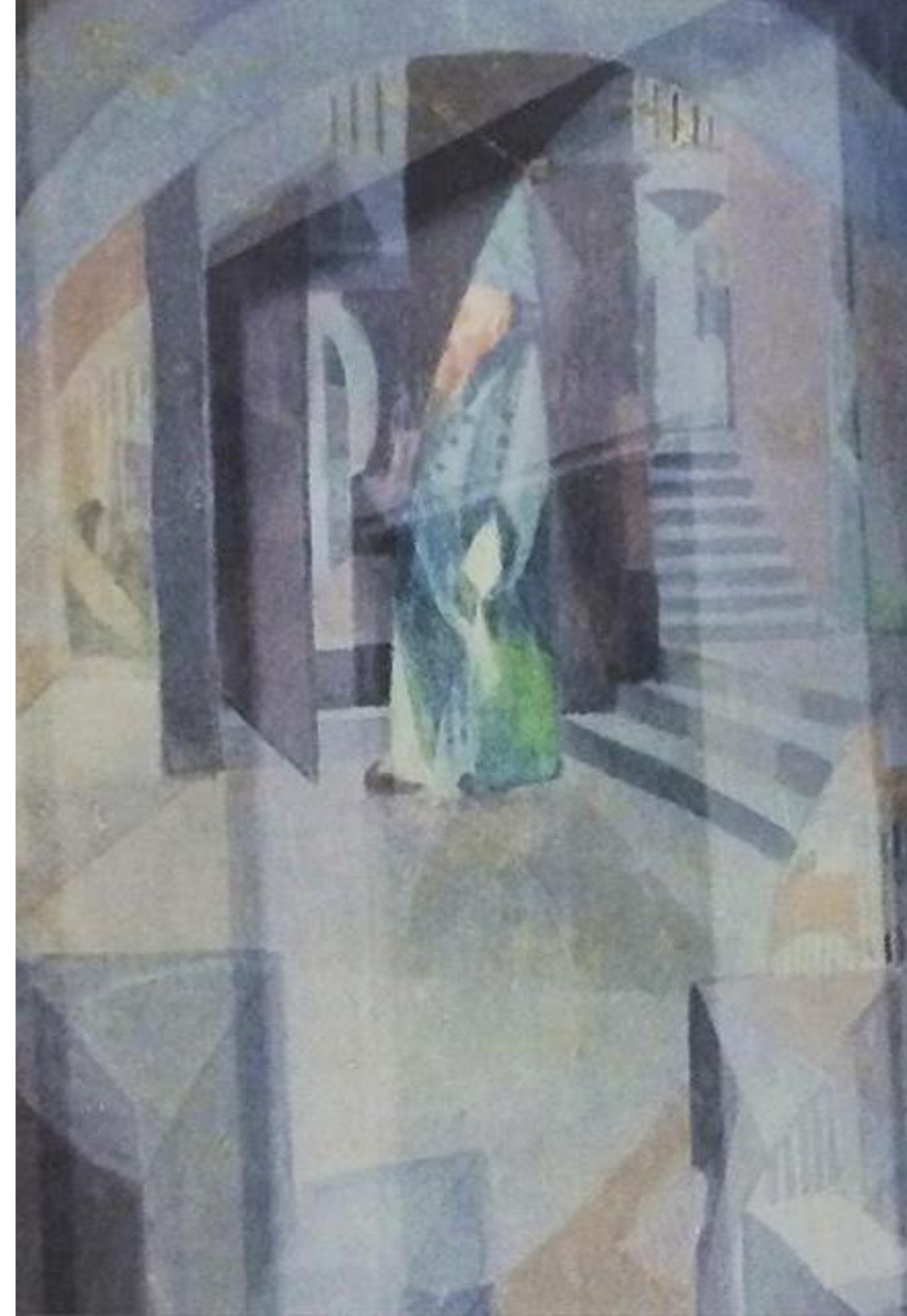
As an example:

Islam is generally seen to be an exclusivist religion, because of its concern with the revelation of the Prophet Muhammad, the uniqueness of the Qur'an, and the centrality of monotheism as correct belief.

Most Islamic thinkers on religious plurality believe that in order to avoid damnation, one must perform the *shahada*, the profession of Muslim faith, which states:

There is no god but God.

Muhammad is the messenger of God



THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

However, Islam's relationship with other monotheistic faiths is more complicated than this Islam = Exclusivist assumption presents, as is its relationship with non-monotheistic faiths.

As an example, Jews, Christians, and Sabians are known as *'Ahl al-Kitāb*, the people of the book, which differentiates between those religious groups seen to possess revelatory scripture and those who do not.

This highlights a difference between the central concerns of the Islamic tradition and the Christian tradition, which results in different considerations motivating their responses to religious plurality.



City in the Night, c. 1920/25

THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

For most of the Islamic tradition, it is this possession of scripture that is important, as it sets those people apart as having access to some form of revelation, even if this needs to be completed or uncorrupted by the tradition of Islam.

Another example of this, is the Islamic response to questions about those never reached by the preaching of Islam, the *ahl al-fatrah*. This question has, of course, exercised a number of different religious traditions and philosophical thinkers.



THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

Some Muslim scholars, eg the Mu'tazila, maintain that this group of people should have pondered over God's Creation until they perceived the basic truths of God's existence and uniqueness.

If they managed to reach the truth by their deep thinking, then they will be spared God's Punishment, but not otherwise as individuals have a duty to utilise their reason appropriately and to recognise the obviousness of the divine.

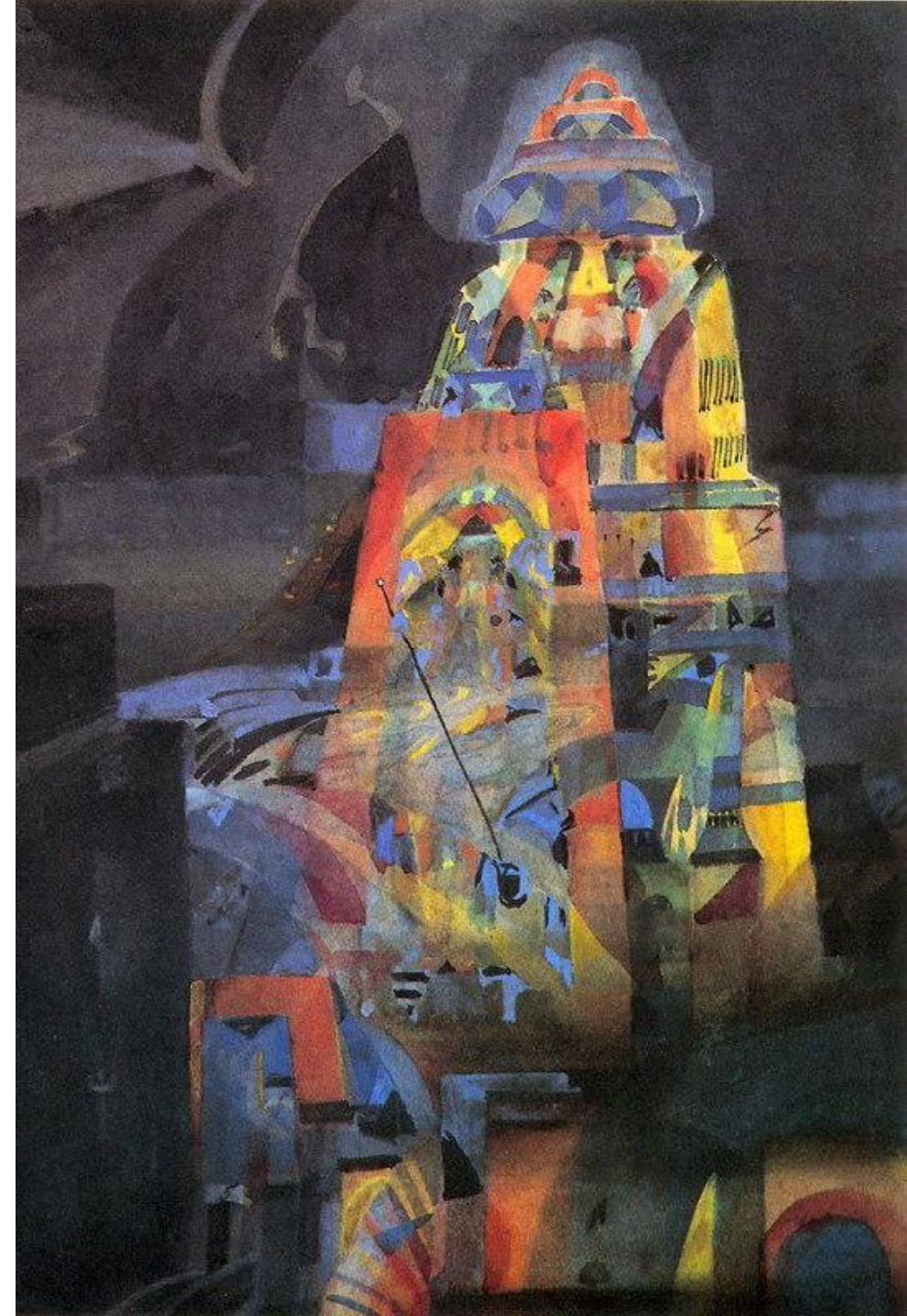


THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

Other Muslim scholars, such as Al-Ghazali, state that people are to adhere to religious ordinances and to proclaim faith only if God sends them a divine legislation through a prophet. This group backs their view by citing the following verse:

Whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul. And whoever errs only errs against it. And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. And never would We punish until We sent a messenger.

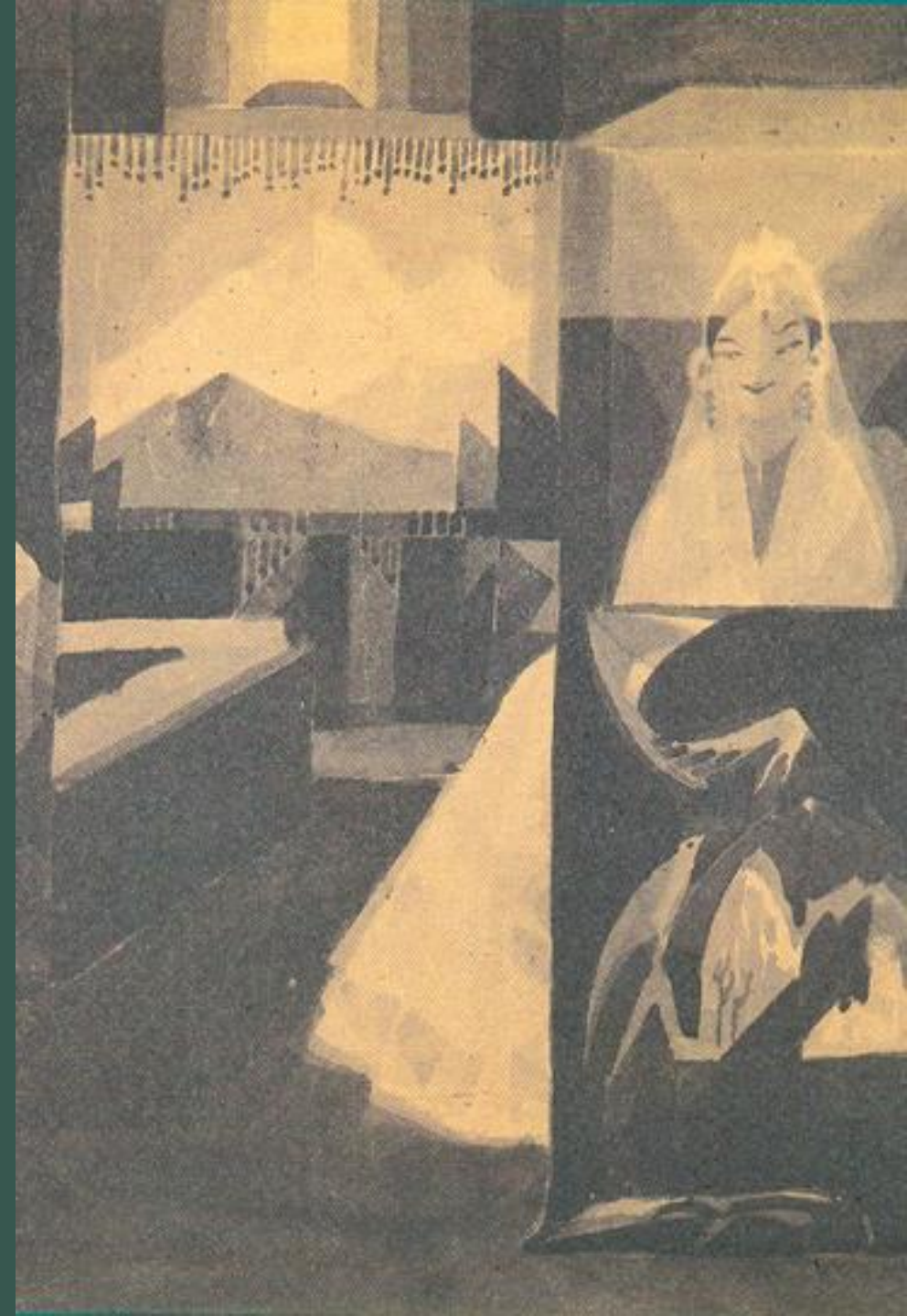
(Al-Isra 15)



THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

What we can see is that there are facets of the typological responses in all religious traditions.

There are exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist believers in different faiths — though what each individual is being pluralist / inclusivist / exclusivist about will change, as will their understanding of how these terms work within their religious traditions



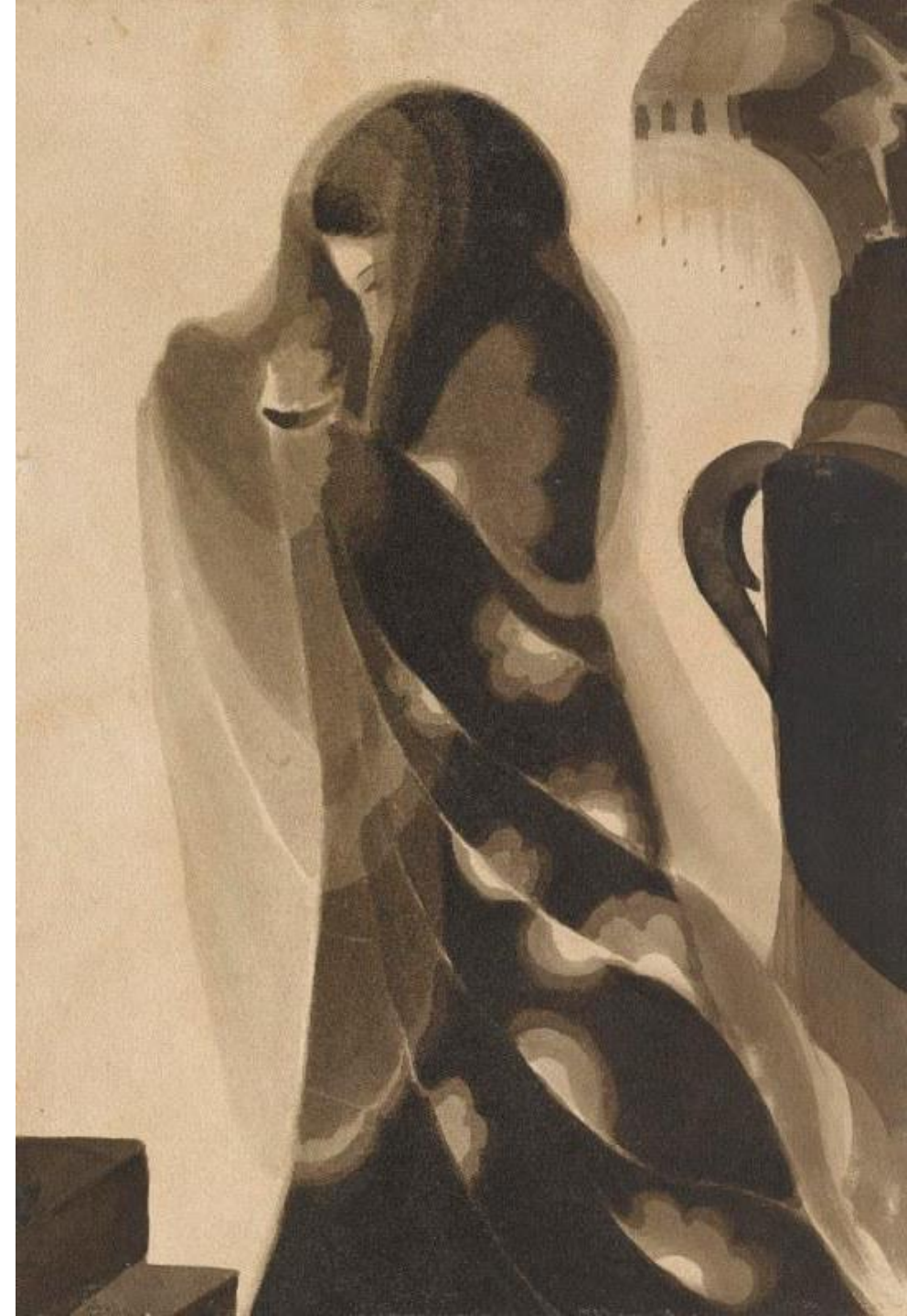
THE CLASSIC TYPOLOGY AND OTHER RELIGIONS

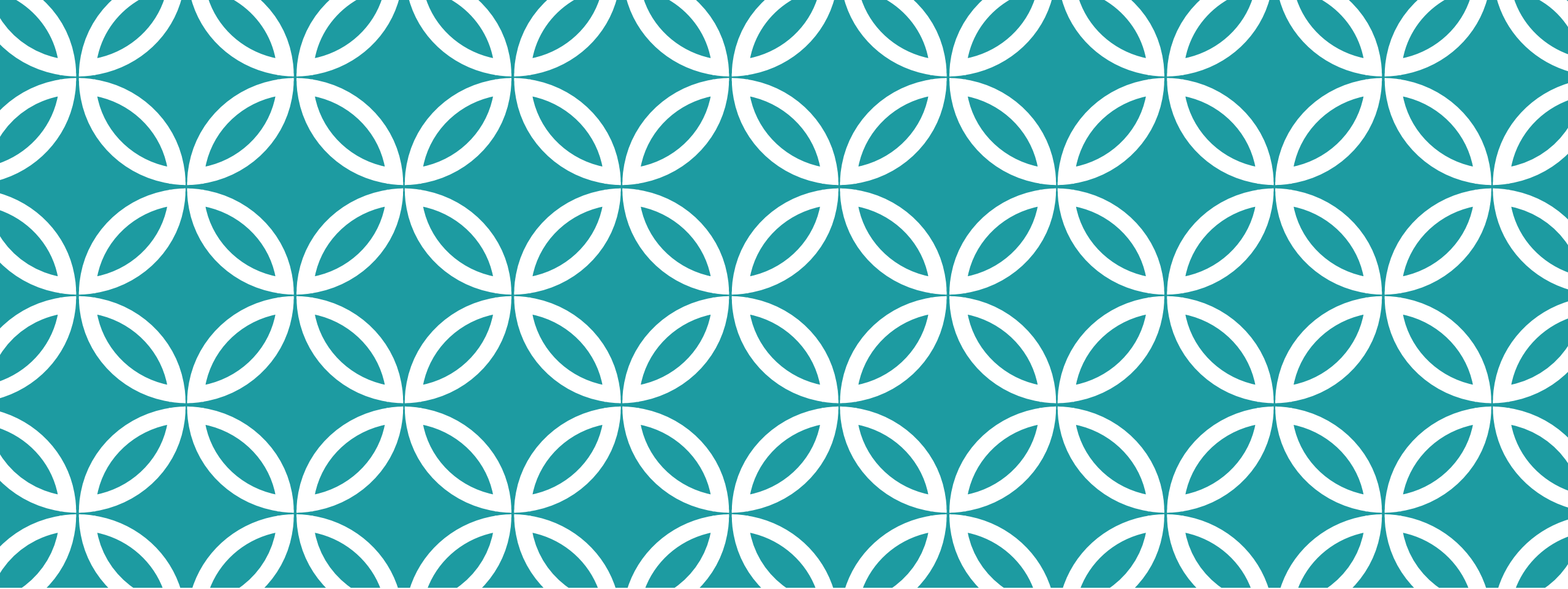
e.g.

Islam – generally exclusivist re: truth and monotheism, also aspects of inclusivism re: monotheism, less representation of pluralism

Buddhism – generally pluralist re: truth and social harmony, also aspects of exclusivism re: escaping samsara and Nichiren Buddhism

Hinduism – generally pluralist re: polytheism, but aspects of inclusivism re: avatarism, and some exclusivism re: hindu caste and national identity





ASSESSMENT 1



ASSESSMENT 1

Style: A short essay, including appropriate citation and bibliography

Length: 4,000 words, 50% of overall mark

Topic:

“The Theology of Religions paradigm has come under increasing criticism in contemporary writing on interfaith dialogue and encounter.

Outline and assess the continuing value of the paradigm, if any, for contemporary interfaith work”



ASSESSMENT 1

The assessment requires you to identify a number of critiques offered of the paradigm of the Theology of Religions (Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism) which you should be familiar with by now.

The assessment then requires you to assess the value of the typology, even after these critiques.

This means you will have to define the paradigm, define the critiques you wish to assess, and delineate how convincing you find them and why.

Without these steps, you run the risk of not clearly outlining the focus of the piece and not developing your analysis sufficiently.

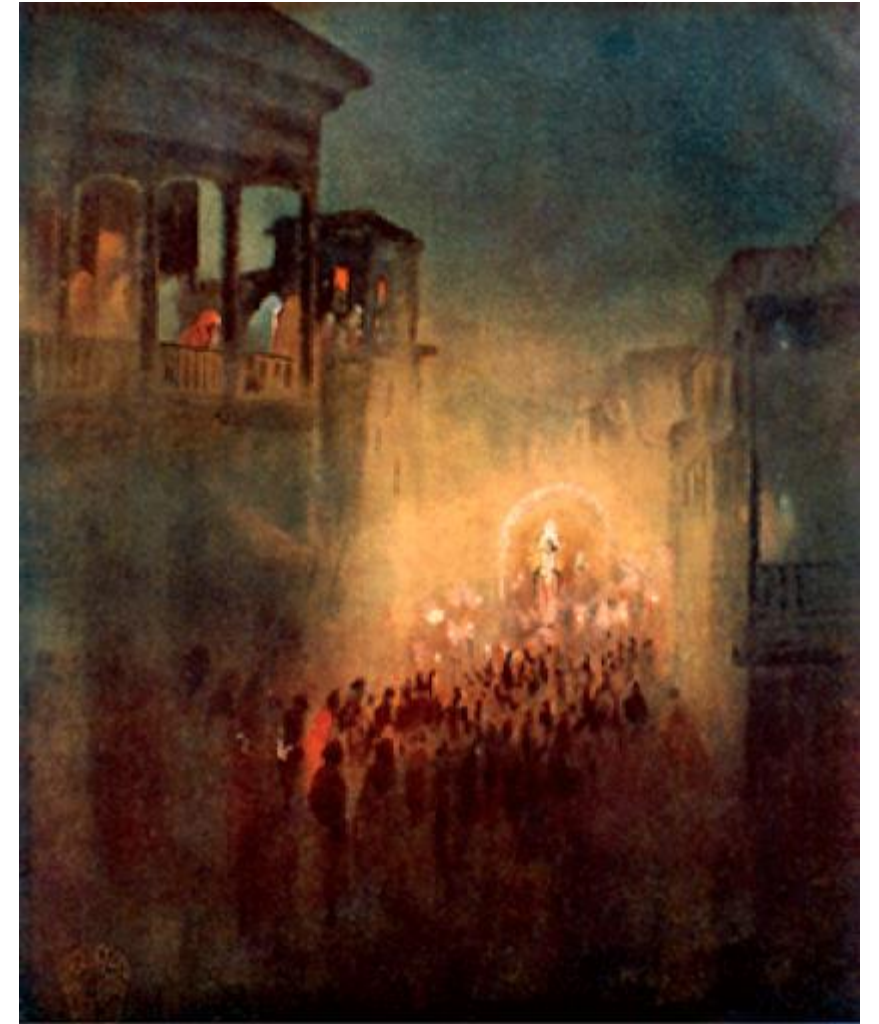


ASSESSMENT 1

As part of your answer, you will need to engage with appropriate academic literature on the topic and showcase your familiarity with it.

This will include not only the readings offered so far, but also additional reading on the topic.

Please make sure that you correctly and steadily cite this literature – I am happy with any referencing system, so long as it is complete, clear, and consistent throughout.



READINGS

Adams G, “Shaking the Typology: Being Honest and Hospitable”

Velez de Cea A, “Comparative Theology of Religions and the Typology Exclusivisms-Inclusivisms-Pluralisms”

Hedges P, “The Theology of Religions Typology Redefined: Openness and Tendencies”

Hettiarachchi S, “Avowing Religious Identity and the Religious Other: A Postcolonial Perspective”

All from:

Harris E, Hedges P, & Hettiarachchi S (eds), (2016) *Twenty First Century Theologies of Religion*, Leiden: Brill.

Available at:

<https://www.dawsonera.com/abstract/9789004324077>