



## **CONFLICT-TRANSFORMATION AND INTERFAITH PEACEBUILDING**

**Contributions from the 31<sup>st</sup> International Seminar on  
Intercultural and Interreligious Care and Counselling**

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**PEACEBUILDING**

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## DÜSSELDORF 2019

31<sup>st</sup> International Seminar on Intercultural and Interreligious Care and Counselling

### **Conflict-transformation and Interfaith Peacebuilding:**

**Impulses for intercultural and interreligious care and counselling**

## INTRODUCTION

## ISSUES AND PROCESSES OF THE SEMINAR

Peace is a question of humanity's survival, as are justice and preservation of the planet. In a time of multiple conflicts and acts of violence in private, social and global relationships, all human beings are called to investigate the causes of conflict, to recognize violence and to promote peace. Religions in particular are called upon to stand up against evil, injustice, violence and abuse of power and to become actively involved in peacebuilding.

Conflicts understood as opposing interests and goals – quite often connected with claims of power – have always been part of human history and still are. However, in a differentiating and globalised world, they can multiply and become fuel for social and political abuse. This can then lead to feelings of insecurity, not infrequently to quarrels and violence. Conflicts can be experienced as existential threats and are often associated with violent emotions such as fear, anger and hatred. Such feelings arise when people's needs are not recognised, when one-sided interests are pushed through, when injustice occurs and a sense of powerlessness spreads. In order to be able to work constructively on conflicts, it is therefore necessary to reflect on how oneself is entangled in the conflict and in which areas one might even be stimulating them. How can we contribute to create a balance of different interests and needs, and how can emotions be transformed in order to enable profound changes of relationships, positions of power, interests and modes of communication? The aim of change is to promote mutual recognition, respect and appreciation.

There are a variety of conflict resolution models used to help overcome violent confrontations and to enable sharing of power. In this Seminar we wanted to get to know, practise and explore the approach of *Systemic Conflict Transformation* - a holistic method in conflict management. It asks about the emergence of conflicts, analyses their dynamics and works to balance conflicting interests and transform conflict feelings into feelings of solution, so that mutual recognition and appreciation can grow. In the Seminar we wanted to investigate also at which points of care and counselling in different cultural and religious contexts the approach of *Systemic Conflict Transformation* can become helpful.

In some *workshops* with cases from different areas (family - societies - religious and ideological references) we wanted to test, practice and check the working methods of the Systemic Conflict Transformation. We regret that it is not possible to document the workshops, since we worked on special cases from many different parts of the world. But a detailed introduction to this method is given in this magazine by Jörgen Klußmann.

In lectures we discussed different topics and proposals how people can contribute to peace-building. They all are included in this volume.

The seminar had the aim to offer a space for open discourse and fruitful exploration, in order to experience a "spirituality of appreciation", which is useful for care and counselling in diverse contexts.

It should also be mentioned that we began the Seminar on 1 September, the 80th anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War, which brought so much suffering. This background has inspired us to work for peace even in the future. Jesus Christ says: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called God's children.

# INTERFAITH PEACEBUILDING IN THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN THE RHINELAND

## “The Westside Story” – Perspectives of the Evangelical Church in Rhineland

*Rev. Barbara Rudolph,  
Representative of the Board of the Church in Rhineland,  
Head of the Department of Theology and Ecumenism*

The Church in Rhineland is located at the very West of our country; the church has borders with France, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands, that means: with all neighbor countries of Germany in the West. When I am talking about Rhineland, I am telling a *Westside Story*.

It is interesting; most of the Germans know those neighbor countries as a place of vacation, but not so much about the church relationship to these countries. The Church in the Rhineland is more orientated to the East, to the churches behind the former wall. 1<sup>st</sup> of September e.g. our church had a common Skype worship together with a Polish congregation to remember the beginning of World War II 80 years back. We also have partnerships to Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia.

But the Church in Rhineland is also very much orientated to the West: There is a Belgium-German Church Convent, which was founded right after World War II. In the last years we went together to the battle fields of *Belgium*. The small Church of Belgium and the big Rhenish Church need each other to commemorate the dead of World War I and World War II.

Going to *France*: Together with the United Protestant Church in France we have a common house in Paris, called, Foyer Le Pont. In the house a volunteer from Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste (Action Reconciliation – Service for Peace) is working<sup>1</sup>. This is a peace organization which was founded after World War II. And last year we met with the French partners to have an exchange about the traces of World War I in our families.

Looking to the *Netherlands*: There is a cross-border exchange with our Dutch neighbors, which goes back to very old times, when reformed refugees from the Netherlands came to cities and

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<sup>1</sup> The Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste (ASF), also known as Action Reconciliation/Service For Peace (ARSP) in English-speaking countries, is a German organisation of the peace movement. It was founded in 1958 by Lothar Kreyssig at the Synod of the Protestant Church in Germany. The organisation is particularly known for its international volunteer programme and the organisation of work camps in Western and Eastern Europe. Further information in English in the internet under: <https://www.actionreconciliation.org>

towns in the Lower Rhine Region because Roman Catholic Spain had conquered the Netherlands.

Watching me describing our Western place in Germany I see how much I have to tell about war and reconciliation to understand the situation of the Rhenish Church. You might get an idea why peace is important for us.

Our area is dominated by the River of Rhine. Of course, the Rhine was and is always a phenomenon of economy and trade, wine and castles, but also of conquest and war. The “Churches at the Rhine River”, a regional group of the Conference of Protestant Churches in Europe always reminds that the river of border and protection became a river of peace and reconciliation. The churches gave themselves the motto: “Let’s build bridges.”

As I am talking of geography, I like to take you on a short pilgrimage of justice and peace to some places of power and places of pain on a short pilgrimage of justice and peace. Starting in the North in Duisburg a city of coal and steel, production site of weapons and a center of transportation. This city was occupied twice by France, after World War I and after World War II, because this was a place of danger and aggression for Germanys enemies. In this very region the European steel and coal community between Germany and France was founded in the Fifties of the last century, the starting point of the European Union and a very much peaceful future.

Further south you arrive in Düsseldorf, not only the place where our church office is located but also the place of Rhein-Metall, one of Germanys biggest companies of weapons, and further South the Rhine River you find Bonn, the former capital of Germany, still city of some ministries, especially the Ministry of Defense. Here in Bonn the peak of the peace movement in the early Eighties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century took place – but still we have nuclear weapons on our ground, in the mountains of Hunsrück, in Büchel, the only place in Germany with American nuclear weapons.

So, what does it mean for a church in Rhineland to be, as the World Council of Churches says, on a “pilgrimage of peace and justice” or, as this conference is titled, to realize “Conflict transformation and interreligious peace work”?

I give you a short inside in the recent peace paper of the Church in Rhineland, published by the Synod in 2018 and in a process of discussion in the local churches right now:

#### *1. Learning from Ecumenical partners*

The Church in the Rhineland learnt from its international situation and the ecumenical partners, especially from the United Church of Christ in the US. This Church declared itself as a “Just Peace Church” in 1985. Since then the Church in the Rhineland is

discussing to go the same way and finally passed a Peace statement in the Synod 2018, which is now discussed all over in our church. I like to give you a short inside:

## 2. *The Paradigm change*

The peace statement is called "*On the way to a just peace*" and is voting for a preference of a non-violent approach to every kind of conflict, not voting for an absolute nonviolent way, but a preference for solutions without weapons.

That means activity, nonviolent actions, and investment of money, research, people and other resources in a nonviolent exploration for peace. That means counseling mediating instead of learning how to use weapons.

This is the opposite of the discussion which is right now in the NATO to invest in weapons to defeat conflicts. Maybe you know the 2% discussion: Germany is supposed to pay up to 2% of its budget for military – and is hesitating to do. I know it is not that simple, but the approach to conflicts is very different in the military doctrine than in the just peace movement.

In the discussion war is very often described as "ultima ratio". The peace statement of Church in the Rhineland says, instead of war as ultima ratio we have to think about non-violence actions as "prima ratio". You see, there is a paradigm change. A long time "just war" was a good way to minimize violence, in the modern war we see, that the way to prepare for peace is to train in peace and not in war. In former times we said: Si vis pacem para bellum (If you want peace prepare for war). Now we say: Si vis pacem para pacem (If you want peace, prepare for peace.).

## 3. *Non-Violence means activity*

What we know from the nonviolent movement, Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King and other less famous people, is, that nonviolence means creativity, not expected actions, community building and at the same time confronting with issues of injustice. It won't be easy; there is fight and struggle, but not violence. So, the peace statement applies: Be ready to have resources of sustainability, read the bible, take the approach of Jesus to people, find supporters in the Ecumenical movement of the past (Bonhoeffer) and today (World Council of Churches – Pilgrimage). Have a spiritual approach. You will need it.

## 4. *Call to action*

Finally, the statement of the Church becomes very concrete what to do:

- More money for peace education, less money for military education
- Reduction of weapon export
- No American nuclear weapons on German ground

- Ecumenical encounters with neighbor churches
- Interreligious dialogue for peace.

*Finally*

You might guess that there is not a straight way to peace.

We have a lot of questions even in the Westside, just to mention three:

1. What does a call to just peace mean, when countries like Lithuania, Latvia or Poland are afraid to go the same way like Ukraine, attacked by military of Russia? Can the West ignore the fear of these countries in the East?
2. Now we have a heavy discussion in Germany on Antisemitism. Antisemitism is growing again and disturbing our society. There is a question, which is not easy to answer: what is Antisemitism, micro aggression against Jews and criticism (for example about the policy of the Israeli Government).
3. How are communication, confrontation and reconciliation working in our own church? That means: how to mediate pastors who are chaplains in the army and pastors who are engaged in the peace movement?

We all are called to be peacemakers – and is not an easy but blessed way to follow the call of Jesus Christ - also with sisters and brothers of other faith.

## **The Christian – Islamic Dialogue in the Rhineland**

*Reverend Rafael Nikodemus*

*Department of Theology and Ecumenism in the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland*

1.

The development of the Christian-Islamic dialogue in the Rhineland is closely connected with labour migration in the 1960s. When about 60 years ago the first of the so-called "guest workers" came from Southeast Europe, Turkey, from Morocco and other countries to Germany and the Rhineland, a larger Muslim community arised.

Later on, refugees came to Germany including many Muslims: in the 1980s from the former states of Yugoslavia, later and still until today from Afghanistan, Somalia and finally in 2015 about one million Syrian refugees. Today there are 5 million Muslims living in Germany. Besides the refugees there are many people living here in the second and third generation. Many were born here and Germany is their homeland.

That means: We have Muslims in Germany who have different cultures, different languages, different ideas about other religions and living together and who feel connected to their home countries in different ways.

2.

Today we have a situation of change referring to the position of Muslim communities in the society. Muslims have become native here, they build up their mosques, cemeteries, kindergartens, ... and they want to participate in society.

I would like to make a very short comment on the relationship between state and religion in Germany, because this is important for understanding the dialogue situation the current background of Muslim life in Germany. There is a separation of state and religion and at the same time the German Constitution grants the religions a very wide positive room for acting in society. The state supports religions in their social work, but not in religious affairs. With the churches this has grown historically. And we say: The Islam and the Muslims who are meanwhile rooted here should also participate in this relationship and be treated in exactly the same way as the Christian churches. This is an imperative of religious freedom. This process of change is at the same time a challenge for all involved, for the state, the Muslims and the majority society.

3.

Tensions, conflicts, prejudices and the question of how integration can succeed arise in this process of change. This means for the Christian-Islamic dialogue in the Rhineland:

a) The Christian-Islamic dialogue is becoming a dialogue at eye level, a dialogue between equal partners. The first interreligious groups (around 1980), which were formed to establish contacts, still saw themselves as door openers for Muslims into society and to the authorities. At that time, no administration or authority was yet interested in Muslims or foreigners living in Germany. Christians interested in dialogue saw themselves as a voice of those who did not yet have a voice. This has changed today. Muslim organisations speak for themselves and at this point do not need any more diaconal attention from the churches.

b) The dialogue has become diverse and colourful. It has arrived in all areas of life and fields of work: in the districts (neighbourhood, sports clubs, church congregations, mosque associations, etc.), in the urban society, in hospitals, schools, kindergartens, educational institutions and also in institutions such as the police, city administration, in the state and the federation.

In all this fields the question arises about the relationship to the Muslims, how we deal with each other, how we can live well together and how we can create a common society? How can we deal with emerging conflicts in living together? How can we act together?

c) Important is the question: How we can cooperate in order to build up the society together. Nowadays it is a society that understands itself increasingly less religiously. Therefore, cooperation with Muslim organizations in the field of youth work, kindergartens, education becomes more important. For example, we have a Jewish-Christian-Muslim cemetery in Wuppertal, we have joint round tables in the cities and districts to regulate common interests or a cooperation in the training of youth leaders with a mosque association.

There is a development to Muslim pastoral care in hospitals, in prisons, in the army. There are Muslim cemeteries, kindergartens, youth or women's education centres, Islamic faculties at universities, Islamic religious instruction at schools, etc. Everywhere there is a close exchange between Muslims and churches.

Just one example: there is the so-called emergency pastoral care. Its task is to support the police in the delivery of a message of death in the event of a car accident in which there were deaths and to provide pastoral care for the relatives. Together with the Christian-Islamic Society, the Rhenisch Church has been organising a training for Muslims for 10 years in order to involve Muslims in this field of pastoral care. Now we have Muslim contacts and agreements between the Protestant Church and Muslims in several regions, which describe the joint work of the emergency pastoral care in cooperation. Important is that everyone is there for everyone. Also, a Muslim coworker/colleague can take over the pastoral care with Christians or others and vice versa.

#### 4.

There is another development: we have a new polarisation and racism in Germany. There are people, who populistically abuse the fears of the people and strengthen prejudices against Jews, Muslims, refugees, all foreigners. There is violence against Jews, there are attacks against synagogues and mosques. Often there is resistance from parts of the people, when a new mosque is built. Here it is good to have and maintain contacts with each other in order to work on solutions in case of conflict. Here the long practice of encounter at all levels has proved its importance and here we see a great responsibility for the religious communities.

#### 5.

Especially in this difficult atmosphere the Rhenish church has led a discussion process of several years about our relationship to Islam. It was important that our church congregations, the church districts, our members participate in this discussion process. Our Synod last year brought these discussions together and passed a resolution that encourages people and the congregations and empowers them in their encounters with Muslims and in living together. It is recorded in this resolution:

From our own faith and the confession of Jesus Christ we recognise the faith of Muslims as binding to the one God.

This does not mean that the differences have disappeared, but faith in the one God is a great common ground and a good basis for understanding and acting.

The members of our church are encouraged to talk about their own faith in dialogue, to listen to the faith of others, to get to know each other and to act together wherever possible. Mission in the sense of conversion has no place in this dialogue.

The Regional Synod encourages to strengthen the dialogue, affirms its commitment to freedom of religion and welcomes the efforts of Muslims to establish in Germany their own organisations and encourages many forms of cooperation.

6.

Finally: All efforts for encounter and of a mutual understanding want that people value and respect each other living in the neighbourhoods and working together. Religion plays an important role, but not the only one. Here it is necessary to create spaces of encounter, for example in Protestant kindergartens, in which many Muslim children also go. One celebrates Christian and Muslim feasts, mothers and parents come together and talk about their lives, exchange their ideas of education and health and let each other participate in the daily lives. We call this the dialogue of life.

7.

As a church we are embedded in a network of ecumenical relationships with partner churches in Indonesia, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Congo, Tanzania, Namibia, Rwanda, USA and Europe. Here too the question of living together with people of other cultures and religions plays an important role.

In September 2019 we have met representatives of the partner churches and their respective Catholic and Muslim partners (including Buddhist representatives) for the Second Interreligious Peace Conference in Zanzibar. Here we have exchanged ideas on how we can work interreligiously for peace and inclusive societies.

# CONFLICT-TRANSFORMATION

## Systemic conflict transformation – a holistic approach to conflict transformation

*Jörgen Klußmann*

**Study Leader Politics at the Evangelical Academy of the Rhineland**

### How I came to Systemic Conflict Transformation

After September 11, 2001, the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, I was repeatedly invited as a journalist to be a trainer for reporting about conflict in various crisis countries. At the same time, my own first marriage was quite conflict-laden. While teaching journalists in Indonesia and Nepal how best to analyse a conflict, I fought at home with my wife. To save the marriage, I made various therapeutic attempts and came to Bert Hellinger<sup>2</sup> for family constellation. I decided to train for systemic constellations and systemic coaching and learned the systemic methods.

Finally, at a workshop in Nepal, I was asked "how can we solve our conflict between Maoists and Royalists?"

Then I decided to make a systemic constellation of the conflict that the participants had described. It was about the story of a woman whose husband had died in the war, now that his widow had no rights whatsoever. From then on, I began to work regularly with constellations and combined them with non-violent communication methods<sup>3</sup>. So, I came more and more away from journalism and turned to conflict resolution. It quickly became apparent that the systemic methods harmonised particularly well with the methods of modern conflict research, especially conflict transformation. Since I knew that I would be confronted with hard facts of the civil war in Nepal, I asked Dr. Marco de Carvalho to join me. He is a friendly systemic psychotherapist from Oldenburg, whom I still knew from school days and who worked on peace work with constellations at "friendship across borders", a German-Israeli-Palestinian organisation. Our cooperation finally led us via Nepal and Indonesia to Afghanistan, where we held

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<sup>2</sup> *Bert Hellinger* is a German author, psychoanalyst and family therapist. Since the late 1970s, he has developed a form of family constellation, which he himself describes as a method of life-support, by modifying methods of systemic family therapy and developing group work. (Wikipedia, German version)

<sup>3</sup> *Nonviolent Communication* is an action concept developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg. It should enable people to deal with each other in such a way that the flow of communication leads to more trust and joy in life. Nonviolent Communication can be helpful in this sense both with the communication in the everyday life and with the peaceful conflict resolution in the personal, vocational or political range. The focus is not on persuading others to act in a certain way, but on developing a respectful relationship that enables more cooperation and joint creativity in living together. Sometimes the terms "empathetic communication", "unifying communication", "language of the heart" or "giraffe language" are also used. (Wikipedia, German version)

seminars on systemic conflict transformation and constellations for several years in a row (see: [library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/07030.pdf](http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/07030.pdf). This documentation is only available in German!).

Later I continued working alone in Burma. To this day I still work with constellations in different contexts, especially in Germany.

### **Why conflicts arise**

Conflicts arise when people's needs are disregarded. We are group beings - we need other people - reference persons who look after us in our childhood, guide us as young people and accompany us as adults in order to grow and prosper. We humans need the feeling of security and refuge within the group. First of all, there is the family, in which everyone has a fixed place and position within the hierarchy. The observance of rankings within the group stabilises the system. At the same time each of us strives for the subjective feeling of freedom, growth or development. At some points the children leave their parental home to go their own way and start new families. In other words - each of us wants to grow!

Within the group or as we call it in systemic work, within a relationship system, all members seek balance. The attachment to one's own group or relationship system not only creates security and refuge, but also shapes the identity of each individual, where everyone learns the rules and how to distinguish themselves from other people in other families, groups, relationship systems. At the same time, however, everyone learns that it is possible to enter into new relationship systems, e.g. by founding an association, building a church or marrying. People need within every relationship system the right to their own place, but also to their own history. If these basic human needs are disregarded, conflict inevitably arises, because then we feel threatened in our existence and development. Our safety and refuge depend to a large extent on the observance of rules, rankings and victims and services. If they are disregarded, the one who has violated them can be punished or sanctioned. If a rule is broken permanently, it can lead to exclusion from the relationship system. In addition, there are culture-specific rules that every relationship system gives itself, such as that Sikhs wear long hair.

We humans of course belong to several relationship systems, which sometimes get along well with each other, but sometimes also get into conflict with each other, because they have different ideas and rules and are not compatible with each other, like e.g. the dietary rules of Muslims, if they have to decide between politeness and religious rule at a personal invitation to a meal with pork meat. In such a case an inner conflict arises as to which rule they should follow. But also, the relationship systems themselves can naturally come into conflict with each other, so that it comes to a group conflict or a system conflict. Of course, this also happens whenever a feeling of threat arises that is existential enough to trigger a group conflict. The more people actively participate in the conflict, the higher the probability that it will develop violently and then immediately become subject to its own dynamics, which are more

difficult to de-escalate than a conflict within a system, we only think of a battle between different football fans!

The human needs for security but also for development have their roots both in the evolution as well as in the primeval social and cultural development of mankind, where they became strategies for behaviour, which proved to be a survival advantage for humans as an organised and integrity-preserving group being and therefore can be regarded as a common human heritage. Of course, these strategies have always been exposed to cultural influences. In each cultural system, in addition to the systemic strategies of behaviour, own culturally specific traditions, structures and rules have developed which must also be observed. If these rules are disregarded, a conflict arises. Systemic conflict transformation practically shows at which level one can start to change or transform the relationship, on the levels of facts or/and emotions.

### **What is conflict transformation?**

Unlike some methods of conflict resolution, conflict transformation assumes that conflicts cannot be resolved at all times. Some conflicts have existed for centuries or decades. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has existed for 70 years and has evolved from a regional conflict to a world conflict. Conflicts between large groups that degenerate into open wars and have led to the loss of life, territory and displacement weigh heavily. They can take several generations to come to terms with, simply because too many people are involved and the suffering is too great to be forgotten. Whole cultures are built on the suffering of conflict systems, think of the Rastafari culture or modern Israel. In them, the suffering of past times still occupies a large space today.

Within a relationship system, conflicts arise when it comes to agreeing on common goals, personnel and resources. Normally, the system is working on balance, but when conflicts become more and more tense and frozen because they remain unresolved and smoulder beneath the surface, they can do harm. Hardened conflicts are usually the cause of further disputes and, in the worst case, can degenerate into violence. As we have seen, such conflicts cannot always be resolved immediately.

On the other hand, however, they can be defused and changed in such a way that the disturbed orders and structures are created in a new way to a certain extent and the sensitivities of the participants and their dependencies on each other are addressed. Thus, a relationship system becomes recognisable, in which there are dependencies and different roles next to each other, which exist sometimes consciously and sometimes also un-consciously of all people involved. Now it is a matter of clarifying the different relationship levels and the fact-levels. It is crucial to pay tribute to the victims, to the losses and sufferings, but also to the special efforts or the additional work and commitment of the people, because they are indispensable

for the emotional balance and thus the stability of relationship systems. Therefore, they must not be ignored in conflict management.

### **What does it mean "systemic"?**

Systemic naturally derives from "system". This means that we all live in relationship systems that bind us differently. The earlier and the closer we grow into a system, such as the family, the closer our ties are to it. The closer the bonds, the more binding are the rules we internalise. The discussion about systems began in the 18th century, when the German mathematician Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728-1777) and the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), independently of each other, asked themselves why organisms live and how they sustain themselves. The biological organism was understood as a "system" in which all parts were interconnected and interacted with each other. More recent systemic approaches can be found in biology, psychology and sociology.

Systemically, social systems build structures that, the more effective they are, the longer they survive. The simplest structure is the hierarchy in which the strongest lead the group. In the family, the parents take responsibility, and at the same time they have more freedom. The children also have more responsibility and more freedom, depending on their age. In this way, group systems are organised in such a way that in an emergency, when the leadership is cancelled, it is usually clear who will take responsibility.

Beside grown relationship systems there are still organized relationship systems, which we created ourselves, like e.g. companies, associations or churches. Some are ancient, such as religions. We were born into them just as much as we were born into families, which is why they are as binding as these. Some are relatively modern and have only existed with interruptions for about a hundred years, such as the democratic constitutional state, which has ensured peace in Europe and the world over the last 80 years. For us Europeans it is the basis for peace and democracy.

### **Solutions from a systemic point of view**

From a systemic point of view, solutions can only succeed if the opponents involved manage to understand each other by understanding that each side suffers just as much as their own. Mutual recognition of victims and services is the key. Then they can see themselves as human beings again and learn to forgive themselves one day and ultimately to reconcile. To this end, all participants must be provided with an insight into the entire conflict system as comprehensive a way as possible in order to enable a change of perspective from their own position to that of the other participants. This requires particularly effective methods of illustration, such as conflict mapping, in which a kind of family tree of the conflict is created. Even more effective is the method of system constellation, in which the participants are positioned in space according to the inner image of a participant. However, this requires a trained constellator. Combinations of both methods are possible, in which, for example, substitutes are placed on

the positions of the persons or groups involved, who in turn can then provide information about their feelings.

### **Systemic constellations**

When a person decides to make a systemic constellation of his conflict, he chooses substitutes from among the people present and asks them to slip into the roles of their father, mother, son, bosses, comrades, etc. and takes them by the hand after they have received permission and constellates them according to their inner image in the room. The other persons, including a deputy for herself, are then added.

This creates a constellation that authentically reflects the real conflict. It is always surprising for everyone how well this succeeds, even though they are completely strangers, for whom one may stand, and what it feels like when one is suddenly involved in the conflict. It is completely different when one looks at the whole conflict from outside or from inside. In this way we gain new and literally broadening insights that help us to better understand the conflict. Of course, people can also be placed on positions of a conflict map.

With the help of the so-called "representative perception", it is possible for us to hear and see authentic feelings and feelings of the real participants. The method of representative perception, with which strangers can empathise with what the real participants feel when they stand on their positions, has now been well empirically proven. Obviously, we all feel the same or very similar in certain constellations, which is not really surprising.

Since the systemic constellation is usually a group therapy or a group coaching, there are usually enough people available to select substitutes, because this is essential for the success of the work, because the real participants would be emotionally too much involved to be able to slip out of their roles.

### **An example from my family history**

There was a photo of my maternal grandfather, who has been dead for more than 40 years now, from the Second World War, which showed him next to a fallen Russian. As I learned from my mother's stories, it was a soldier my grandfather had faced in battle before and my grandfather had proved to be faster than his opponent. I had always been extremely agitated and moved by this story, probably because my mother's younger siblings, a brother and a sister - my uncle and my aunt - would not have lived because they could not have been conceived if my grandfather had been killed instead of the Russian.

During my training, I decided to set up the scene with my grandfather and the Russian and set up a deputy for my grandfather and one for the Russian soldier at a distance of about six, seven meters across from each other so that they could look each other in the eye. What now began was a slow, long taxing of the two, who looked each other in the eyes and obviously

went through all sorts of emotional surges - from panic-stricken fear, unrestrained anger to finally finite grief. They walked towards each other very slowly, but incessantly, until they finally stood directly opposite each other, then finally falling into each other's arms and sobbing hopelessly.

For me, this constellation has shown that even after many decades of conflict, it is still effective, but can still be dealt with effectively. The common grief and solidarity in the face of death is a consolation for the relatives afterwards, because it shows that the two know deep down that they had no other choice and one had to fall by the wayside. The deputy for the Russian soldier finally felt that my grandfather was not to blame and so they could mourn together, which did me good, as grandson, and relieved and freed me from this guilt. If we want to resolve conflicts in the long term, we must always pay special attention to the people who have sacrificed themselves, so that we can live as we do today. This recognition and appreciation give satisfaction, peace and liberation to the conscience and collective memory of such a great system of relations as a nation or a people, but also to each individual, because it commemorates those who have suffered or had to make a special effort.

I have worked with the method in Afghanistan, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, but also in other countries, which proves that it is also a holistic, cross-cultural method in the truest sense of the word, which hopefully still finds many followers and friends.



# INTERFAITH PEACEBUILDING

## Violence and peace in Quran

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Globalization and the numerous political and religious conflicts in the world show that there is still a need for more cooperation between cultures and religions living together. In order to meet this need, there is not only a need for peaceful coexistence according to the principle: "You live peacefully there and I live peacefully here", but rather a need for peaceful coexistence and mutual acquaintance. Peace work on a religious level, on the other hand, means that different groups of one religion as well as people belonging to different religions can talk to each other about common problems, exchange ideas, work together and live together. But how far does interreligious peace work go or should go, especially from the Islamic point of view? To what extent is Islam really a religion of peace and tolerance? Or is it not the case that the Koran preaches hatred to the "others"? How are the "delicate" verses that call for violence to be understood in this context? What does the Koran say about dealing with those of other faiths? What about similarities or love and forgiveness?

Two main questions are used to examine whether and to what extent the Koran calls for interreligious peace work and to what extent it provides a basis for this, and whether the verses preaching against peace and tolerance are contradictory to those calling against violence or war.

### **1. Does the Koran call for interreligious peacebuilding?**

The term "interreligious peace work" does not appear in the Koran as an independent term. Rather, this term has its origin in modernity. Here it is understood as a conversation between the members of different religions, to which the striving for world peace and the reduction of prejudices, hatred and fear belong. But "interreligious peace work" means also the economic, social and political relationship with non-Muslims, which is carried out in a tolerant, respectful and tolerating action. All these peace efforts are encompassed by the modern understanding of interfaith peace work.

In the following, three aspects will be examined to determine whether and to what extent the Koran calls for interreligious peace work and provides the basis for it:

- (1) Coming together to a Word (Sure3/64)
- (2) Avoidance of the will to persuade or the imposition of one's own religions (Sura 2/256)

(3) Conducting interreligious dialogue in the best possible and peaceful way (Sura 16/125)

### **1.1 Coming together in one word**

The Qur'an says: "*Tell (to them, o Messenger): "O their owner of the Book, come to a Word common to us and to you, that we serve no one but God, and that we do not put partners at His side, and that some of us do not take others as masters instead of God."*" (3/64)

According to the exegete *Suat Yıldırım* (born 1941), this verse is regarded as the greatest ecumenical call to the global world ever. It was revealed in the 9th year after the Hijra (631 A.D.) and called together the members of the religions at that time, in this case the Christian of Nedschra, to a common word, beyond conflicts. This word, according to another exegete, *Elmalili Hamdi Yazır* (died 1942), had "*offered mankind a broad, viable and true path to salvation and freedom*" and showed "*how different opinions, peoples, religions and scriptures can unite in an essential conscience and in a word of truth*".

The meaning of this verse has lost nothing of its value, on the contrary, it has grown exponentially. Today it is perhaps still of elementary importance. Today, the followers of the three monotheistic religions comprise almost half of the world's population, and the tendency is rising. However different they may be, the first and supreme commandment of the three monotheistic religions is the unity of God. This call to God as a common Word is particularly remarkable, since God is at the center of religions. Muslims as well as Jews and Christians believe that God created people to love, respect, honor and cherish Him.

Charity, which starts from the love of God, is considered, just as in Christianity and Judaism, also in Islam as an important element. Since love for one's neighbor or for humanity emanates from God, weak and non-functioning interreligious relationships can regain their strength through love of God. This means that if the interlocutors in the interreligious dialogue hold fast to him (through charity) and invite him, they can in this way together achieve something for humanity.

According to the theologian *Ahmet Kurucan* (born 1961), coming together in one word should not only be limited to God, but extended to different commonalities, such as charitable, social and societal projects, with the aim of serving mankind. Thus, one could put an end to the dangers of war, conflicts, but also to ecological problems such as water and air pollution and social problems such as the gap between rich and poor and the decline of moral values.

### **1.2 Avoidance of the will to persuade or the imposition of one's own religion**

The Koran says, "*There is no compulsion in religion.*" (2/256)

In his classically oriented exegesis, the Koran exegesis Hamdi Yazir cites the situation where Muslims wanted to force their sons to Islam, who had been converted to Christianity at the time of idolatry. On the basis of this occasion and relying on many of his classical predecessors Hamdi Yazir believes that the freedom of faith expressed in this sentence is still to be attributed to Christians and Jews and by no means includes the polytheists. According to post-modern exegetes (like Ahmet Kurucan and Suat Yildirim), however, this is understood as universal because this verse was revealed at a time when Muslim society in Medina was gaining political and military power. It is an indication that Muslims do not allow themselves to be taken over by their power and on this basis force people of other faiths to convert. Here we must also follow the example of the Prophet, who according to the Koran only had the task of admonishing and warning (88/21) and was not allowed to prescribe faith to others (88/22).

An important aspect which gives the verse (2/256) strong support is religious pluralism. This means that even if the interreligious dialogue were to be carried out with the ulterior motive of missionary work, it would be impossible after the Koran that everyone in the world would accept the Islamic faith; the Koran states: "*If your Lord had wanted it, all who are on earth would certainly have believed together. So, do you want to force people to believe?*" (10/99) "*If your Lord had so willed, He would have made all mankind a single community (with the same faith, the same worldview, and the same way of life)*". (11/118)

*"For each of you, We have set a direction and a path. And if God had wanted, He would have made you one community. But He will test you in what He has given you. So, hurry to the good things in competition..."* (5/48)

Therefore, living together is a duty, since people can never become one. This knowledge of plurality is considered an enrichment and is a basis and a key to living together, and the Koran itself legitimizes this. However, in order to make common life possible, a peaceful atmosphere is needed, which is only possible by granting freedoms such as freedom of faith, opinion and religion, as the Koran also does: "*And say: 'The truth from your Lord'. So, whoever wills, may he believe; and whoever will, may he be unbelieving*". (18/29) See (10/108; 76/29)

The granting of freedoms speaks for a peaceful coexistence. But much more can be read from the Koran, namely the commitment to peaceful coexistence. It prescribes Muslims to get to know the "other", to live together with him or to do good and peace work together: In the Koran it says: "*O you people! We have indeed created you from a single (pair of) man and woman and made you peoples and tribes, so that you may know one another*". (49/13)

The imposition of religion is put aside, even the imposition of cooperation is not permitted: (39/7, 74/11 and 4/84). In the case of a conversation with an atheist, even the imposing mention of God or religion is not permitted, since faith in God is not present. The concentration is therefore on other intersections, since everyone has these with everyone, even if they are only points on a huge surface.

### **1.3. The most beautiful and peaceful way of conducting inter-religious dialogue**

The Kuran says: "*And have no disputes with those to whom the Book has been given, except in the best of ways...*" (29/46)

*"Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful admonition and discuss with them in the best possible way. Verily thy Lord knows better who has strayed from His way; and He knows better those who follow the guidance"* (16/125)

So we better leave the judgment of our fellow humans to God. Instead, we should strive for a just and tolerant attitude towards them. Religion is about our actions, for which we are responsible. Therefore, another passage in the Koran says: "... and I have been commanded to do justice among you. God is our Lord and your Lord. We have our works and you have your works! There is no reason for dispute between us and you. God will bring us together, and the way of life leads to Him". (42/15)

For a sustainable and especially fruitful contact, the interreligious dialogue must be conducted in the best possible way. In the best possible way, without insulting or hurting the other person, this means saying something that he or she would not like. However, this only happens if one respectfully listens to the partner, without cultivating the idea of missionary work. This and further calls (17/53 and 2/83), in which God calls Muslims to speak only the most beautiful things, do not only refer to Muslims, but are universal and thus also addressed to polytheists, since in the verse no one is addressed concretely.

The open dialogue, the tolerant behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad in relation to people of Scripture became exemplary for Muslims. In the treaty concluded with the Christians of Najran who lived in southern Arabia, the Prophet gave an example of peace, dialogue, tolerance, respect, coexistence and justice. The Treaty contained the following article: "*The lives of the people of Najran and its surroundings, their religion, their land, property and livestock, both those who are present and those who are absent, their ambassadors and places of worship are under the protection of Allah and the guard of His Prophet*".

A very nice example is also that the Prophet placed the mosque in Medina at the disposal of this Christian delegation so that they could pray there.

## **2. Is the Koran against peace?**

### **2.1 Killing the unbelievers wherever you come across them (Sura 2: 190 - 194)**

*Verse (2:191) Common translation:*

*"And kill them (the unbelievers) wherever ye meet them, and expel them out from wherever they have expelled you out. For seducing [to unbelief] is worse than killing"* (2:191)

*(2:191) complete and in context with (2:190) and (2:192-194)*

*"Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but do not commit aggression. Allah certainly does not love aggressors! (190) Kill them wherever ye find them, and expel them from wherever they expel you. Persecution is harder than killing! Do not fight against them at the Ka'bah until they fight against you in it. If they fight you, kill them. Such is the retaliation for the deniers. (191) If they abstain (from aggression), Allah is all-forgiving, all-gracious! (192) Fight against their fighters so that there is no more persecution and glorification is dedicated only to Allah. If they then abstain (from aggression), then there is no attack except against those who commit injustice. (193) Fight them for a protected month if they fight you for a protected month. For the protected things, retaliation applies. If someone attacks you, fight them to the same extent by using force. And fear Allah, and know that Allah is with those who fear Allah." (194) (2:190-194)*

#### **Reason for descent:**

Ibnu 'Abbas reported: "These verses were sent down in connection with Al-hudaibiyah agreements. When the Messenger of Allah and his companions were prevented from reaching the Ka'bah (Holy Mosque), he slaughtered his sacrificial animals and made a peace agreement with the polytheists that he would return this year and return next year. They promised him to release Mecca (Holy City) for three days to perform Tawaf (turn) around the Ka'bah and do other things at will. Next year he prepared himself for the 'Umrah Pilgrimage' (the small pilgrimage). But the Muslims feared that the Meccans (inhabitants of Mecca) would not keep their promise and prevent them from visiting the Ka'bah again. They were opposed to fighting them in the invulnerable month at the Ka'bah. Then Allah sent وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لِوَاسْبِيلَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُم "Fight on the way of Allah against those who fight against you". Meant were the Quraish.

Before the revelation of verse 2/191 came, Muslims lived under fear and torture for ten years and were eventually expelled from their home town of Mecca. The Koran, on the other hand, simultaneously called on Muslims to be patient and to test their faith, and advised them not to lose faith in divine justice. If the verses before and after verse 2/191 are not taken into consideration, one could easily come up with the idea that the Koran calls for total war. But the verse before shows why the Koran is saying "*and kill them wherever you encounter them. And expels them.*" There it says: "*Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you; but do not commit aggression.*" (2/190). So, there is talk of the existence of Muslims and the existence of religion, which must be in danger for this call to be valid (22/40). It would also be absurd to continue to act patiently and peacefully on an attack. Accordingly, it is not only a matter of a simple war, but of a just defensive war or a limited legitimization of the war, as a response to the aggressive attack. In the further course of the verse the sentence "*Fight against your fighters so that there is no persecution anymore*" (2/193) is to be countered, which is very decisive in the understanding of the context. In this respect, in addition to the defensive war, it is also a matter of struggle for justice and against oppression (or, in the case of this context, torture), which is the translation of *Fitna*. Accordingly, war can also be seen as

a struggle for freedom of opinion or against ending persecution/suppression, because "suppression is worse than killing" (2/191).

The verse (47/4) is interesting in the context of the defense: "*If you encounter the unbelievers, then strike them until you have brought them down. Then tie them up well. Then release them, either by grace or for ransom, so that the war ceases to burden you...*" These are prisoners who can be released either by grace or for ransom. But why should you start a war when you have to tie up the prisoners and release them again by ransom or grace? So it clearly shows that this is a defensive war that was not initiated by Muslims. The Muslims are called upon to release the prisoners and not to mistreat them excessively "*so that the war ceases (...) to burden...*". The excessive mistreatment is not permitted against all those who think differently, even against those who put God's participation aside (2/190).

Here too it can be seen that certain verses must be understood in their context in order not to contradict the actual spirit of the Koran, namely the call to peace, tolerance and mercy. Therefore, it requires a strong differentiation and a thorough analysis of the given situation in which a verse is revealed. If this principle is followed, it can be seen that no religion is criticized or fought against, but concrete characteristic persons whose political or hypocritical behavior, such as breach of contract or attack due to hatred and envy, ensures that they are directed against Muslims.

The call to war is therefore directed against negative persons who destroy the peaceful atmosphere! For if it were a question of destroying Christianity or Judaism, women and clergy would be killed first. Innocent civilians (or uninvolved persons) or uninvolved women, the elderly, children, the disabled or clergy, however, may not even be attacked in a state of war or even animals not be harmed and cities not be destroyed. On the contrary, it is even a Koranic duty (see 5/8, 16/125, 29/46, 60/8), even after victory or conquest to show respectful behavior to people of other faiths.

In another verse it says: "*The armed fight (against the polytheists from Mecca) was commanded to you, while it is repugnant to you. But perhaps you have a dislike for something while it is good for you, and perhaps you love something while it is bad for you. Allah knows and ye know not*". (2/216)

Ibn Juraidsch reported: "I asked 'Ataa : كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْقُتُولُ وَهُوَ كُرْهٌ لَّكُمْ" , "You are required to fight". Is attacking others therefore an obligation? He replied: "No! It was offered to them (the companions of the Prophet) at that time.

Since for the first time 14 years after the Prophet's mission the Muslims were asked to fight, it was necessary to explain to them that this fight against the polytheistic aggressors from

Mecca is inevitable and good for them, since these aggressors will never stop their aggression until they are defeated.

### **Contextual translation of (2:216)**

The verse is a proof that Muslims were educated to be peaceful people who only fight with weapons when forced to do so. Therefore, they are obliged to stop the fight when the enemy stops his aggression. That is what the Koran says:

*"And if they incline to peace, then you incline to it too and rely on Allah! He is certainly the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing."* (8/61)

These different aspects and the corresponding verses have thus shown that verses that speak of conflict and fight, unlike the peace preaching verses, are to be understood in their context and not to be seen as universal. The former have as their cause the inhuman and peace-disrupting actions which some people had set against Muslims at that time. The verses on peace, on the other hand, are generally valid and universal, since peace, tolerance and forgiveness are at the heart of Islam. One acts against the spirit of the Koran if one translates these verses into the present time without paying attention to the context, and judges Christians and Jews generally according to these verses. They have also shown that the Kuran today must be read and understood anew with the given settings in today's environment, with the intention of working for a more peaceful and better world.

### **2.2 "...do not take the Jews and Christians as friends" (Sura 5:51)**

*"O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as protectors and confidants. Some of them are protectors and confidants of some others"* (5/51) Cf. (4/144, 60/1, 60/13, and 9/23)

The term "أولياء" (Awliyaa) is decisive for the analysis of this verse which appears in the original of verses 3/28, 5/51, 4/144, 60/1, 60/13, 3/118 and 9/23. According to Hans Wehr, this term means: "helper, assistant, benefactor, friend, loved one, relative, patron, guardian, master."<sup>76</sup> And according to the Turkish theologian Davut Aydüz (born 1962): "patron, protector, confidant, friend, advisor, religious leader, partner in e.g. contractual affairs that speak against Muslims, supporter and responsible for the internal affairs of a person."

In order to understand the more precise meaning, however, it is again necessary to know the cause of these verses. Here above all the occasion of a verse (5/51) has to be mentioned, since in this verse it is a matter of an agreement between Muslims and Jews concluded in Medina, in which it was contractually regulated that both partners would hurry to help each other. But Jews broke this contract as soon as they found an even stronger contractual partner, in this case the polytheists. The then Jews of the city wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to harm or destroy Muslims. Even if in this occasion the Jews of Medina are meant concretely, "this verse is not limited to Jews only, but to all non-Muslim contracting parties". Hypocrites

among Muslims also betrayed their own interests to polytheists, such as strategic-political procedures in war. According to the reason for the verse it is in this respect a question of trust. Can we trust those who break an agreement or betray strategies for the expulsion or annihilation of Muslims, or take them as "friends"?

**Translation:**

*"You who have internalized the Iman! Do not take the Jews and the Nazarenes to Wali. Some of them are Wali of others. Whoever of you makes them Wali belongs to them. Allah guides the community that commits injustice, not rightly of course"! (5:51)*

**Reason for descent:**

Ibn Ishaq said: "When Banu-Qainuqa' (Jewish tribe) fought against Allah's Prophet, 'Abdullah Bnu-Ubai (Greatest Hypocrite in Madinah) kept his relationship with them and tried to defend them. 'Ubādah Bnu-samit - he was from Banu-'Auf Bnu I-chazradsch and just as allied with them as 'Abdullah Bnu-Ubai - he went to the Messenger and said: "I tell Allâhu ta'âlâ and His Messenger of this support agreement and take Allâhu ta'âlâ, His Messenger and the Muslims to Wali. I renounce the Kafir and the Walaa contract with them." Because of him and Abdullah Bnu-Ubai these Ayat were sent down from this Sura "Al-maidah".

This is about a Walaa contract (alliance) between two tribes, or between a tribe and a person, or between two persons. The prerequisite for such a contract is two things: First, when I conduct the war, you must participate. Second, if I die in this war, you inherit me and if you die, I inherit you.

With regard to relativization and limitation to the context of that time, the respected theologians Prof. Dr. Hayrettin Karaman, Prof. Dr. Mustafa Çağırıcı, Prof. Dr. Ȣ. Kafi Dönmez, Prof. Dr. Sadrettin Gümüg and editor of Tafsîrs "Kuran Yolu" point out to verse 5/51. They are of the opinion that this verse was "revealed on the concrete context of that time and on the behavior of Jews and Christians as a whole". Thus, not all Jews and Christians are meant, but specifically those who proclaim war against Muslims or behave hostile.

So, this is not about the religion of Christianity or Judaism in general terms, but about the qualities of these people who have the intention to harm the Prophet or Muslims in general. But even with regard to these mentioned Jews who wanted to harm the Prophet and the religion, the Koran calls upon the Prophet: *"And if you judge, then judge between them in righteousness. Truly, God loves those who conscientiously do justice."* (5/42) There is nothing, then, that speaks against being respectful and good-natured toward Jews and Christians, not fighting them because of their faith, and being just to all people. Verse 5/51 is primarily to be understood as a warning to Muslims to be careful and to distance themselves from those who intend to fight the faith.

Accordingly, it can be inferred from these documents that these verses, in which Muslims are called not to trust Jews and Christians or to take them as protectors, aim at concrete people or their characteristics. For, in general, these verses do not call on Muslims not to conclude an agreement with non-Muslims or not to take them outside a state of war as friends/confidants, not to have a personal relationship with them, or generally to be suspicious of anyone (9/71). Muslims are advised only to be vigilant in political-strategic and religious matters. The Treaty of Hudaybiya shows that the Prophet continued to maintain contact with non-Muslims and responded to requests from the polytheists or even the Christian Nedschrans when he was in conflict with the polytheists, he offered the mosque overnight accommodation and worship, or after emigrating to Medina concluded a treaty with Jews of the tribe "Banī Awf", saw them in this treaty as part of the Umma and granted them security and freedom. In this respect, generalizations and a complete distancing of Jews, Christians and polytheists would therefore be against the spirit of the Koran, since the Koran neither generalizes (3/113) nor completely distances itself from them (3/199). So there is nothing in the Koranic language against making friends with the "others", being friendly and just with them, marrying their female relatives (5/5), as long as they do not fight the Muslims because of their faith or expel them from their homes (60/8).

In short, it can be stated that on the basis of a consistent interpretation of the Koran and by means of good knowledge and research of the Koran as a whole it can be recognized that the so-called "war verses" were revealed in the context of war (60/1) and mockery (5/51), and that non-Muslims can be taken as "confidants", "protectors", "friends", "loved ones" or "partners", except in political, warlike or religious matters and if for their part an intention of annihilation or enmity is cherished and the rights of Muslims are in danger.

### **Conclusion**

For the better living together in today's time the renewed study of the Koranic text is important in this respect. However, this study should not be carried out in the form of a simple recitation of the Koran, as is still the case today, but rather in the form of a confrontation with Koran exegesis, which also includes the confrontation with the war verses. Only in this way can ignorance of Islamic theology be prevented. Therefore, the Koranic texts we have seen are reports about certain events and have no general character.

When dealing with the texts of Koran, it is essential that we consider the following points:

- Context of the verse
- Linguistic meaning
- Reasons for descent
- other verses referring to the same subject,

The aim is to be able to distinguish between verses with the character of a report on events at that time and verses that constitute the core of the message of Islam and describe its objective.

It is of the utmost importance for the future of humanity that the followers of religions and world views live together in peace. The world is challenged by conflicts and wars, by nuclear weapons and dictatorships. Overcoming these situations is possible through the dialogue of religious believers, who make up more than half of the world's population.

Muslims assume this task if they act in accordance with the Koran, since the call for peace, balance and justice is considered obligatory. This call is, however, only possible if the members of religion come together for projects or meet and exchange ideas at events and conferences. Thus prejudices, hatred and fear can be reduced. The criticism of Islam or the Koran that it is against reconciliation, coexistence and dialogue between people is superfluous, since the evidence in the Koran clearly shows that peace, tolerance, reconciliation and coexistence are the core of Islam. That speaks for interreligious peace work. In the analysis of the verses presented in their context also show that the Koran attaches great importance to the peaceful atmosphere in society and that this atmosphere has its origin in interreligious dialogue and encounters. In this respect, a constant effort is necessary for an atmosphere of peace, even in a state of war. This effort for peace is so valued that those who work for peace and coexistence of society by relying on commonalities are described as sincere and honest people. According to the Koran, however, this should not happen in peaceful living side by side, but rather in peaceful coexistence (49/13).

I will conclude this lecture with a beautiful quotation from the great Muslim scholar Al Ghazali: *"This earthly world is a caravanserai on the way to God and all people come together in it as fellow travelers. But since they all wander to the same destination and form so to speak one caravan, they must keep peace and harmony with one another and help one another and each respect the rights of the other."*

Both the world of Islam and the world of Christianity and Judaism should strive for a more precise knowledge of each other. In this sense, I wish us all a peaceful world without terror and war, in which we and our children would like to live without fear of bombs. A world in which we and our children do not have to suffer hunger and look into the future with joy.

# **Some Thoughts on Prophetic Monotheism and Interreligious Dialogue**

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1. I'm honored to respond briefly today. I would like to do this as a Catholic theologian and as a practicing pastor with experience in the parish, pastoral care in prisons and military, as well as in the Catholic and ecumenical peace movement. You and I share a theological discipline, Practical Theology, and I will build on that today. At the centre of my thoughts is a practical-theological interest: to make the content of our religions socially fruitful, especially in the field of justice and peace. I am convinced that a context of action, with programmes, is necessary for this. Common practical goals for teaching, care of the sick and pastoral care of prisoners are a healthy basis for dialogue, which has long ceased to be a dialogue between libraries.

2 I was very pleased with your lecture. It is a sign of hope for peace when representatives of religions, including intellectual representatives, speak out in favour of religion having a potential for peaceful action, a potential based on the highest authoritative sources of this religion. This is very important because inter-religious dialogue is not possible without "intra-religious" dialogue, as Raymond Pannikar<sup>1</sup> has already shown us. In addition, it is very important to conduct this dialogue in public, and not only in the space of private life. Especially in our time, which is marked by religious stress, it is very, very important to conduct the dialogue in public and thus to show how one can conduct the dialogue peacefully.

3. In the lecture I heard, among other things, a search for connection with ethical monotheisms other than Islamic monotheisms. The unity of God is in my opinion a very important connection, certainly if one connects this unity with the transcendence of God as such. We all believe that the idols of this world, power, money, sex, athletic heroism, military power are false gods whom one must not worship because God loves and appreciates people.

It seems to me that the world has secularized itself, but behind the secularized emancipation from authoritarian religious traditions, old idols under other names also emerge. Somehow our culture has not yet understood to a large extent that religion is not about whether God is

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<sup>1</sup> A Spanish Roman Catholic priest, professor of the philosophy of religion and important representative of the interreligious dialogue. Raimon Panikkar's work is in several respects a mediation between different "worlds". First of all many of his writings try to promote an understanding between the Christian and Hindu traditions by pointing out commonalities. Panikkar concentrates more on the spiritual part of the religions. Panikkar sees the religious dialogue always also in the whole context of culture, philosophy and especially spirituality. A genuine dialogue is therefore only possible if one can open oneself to each other in "love and sympathy" and thereby share the experience of reality of the other. (Wikipedia on Pannikar in German)

the one we want, not the one who fulfils our needs, but on the contrary that God needs us to promote His justice and His peace. God needs us precisely because He loves us and His whole creation. Here the three ethical monotheisms have common pedagogical tasks: To liberate our relationship with the transcendent God linguistically and culturally from the jargon of human needs. I am sure that Rabbis like *Abraham Joshua Heschel*<sup>2</sup> would underline this. Our God is a God of justice for the poor who promotes the excluded and marginalized. Let us then also implement these socially and culturally critical tasks together. Through a commitment based on justice for the poor the religions will certainly gain credibility. In short: it is time that the ethical-monotheistic religions present the language of their prophetic criticism of idolatry in a linguistically understandable way to the public within the framework of our secularized society. I think, of course, that this tradition of the critique of idolatry also exists in Islam and that it can certainly be updated.

4. In the fourth part of my contribution I would like to formulate some thoughts on inter-religious dialogue. The history of Christianity shows a paradox: any renewal depends on taking up the original inspiration, on seeking the oldest authoritative sources. Critical rationality is also needed in this context so that the sources of faith are understood as what they are profoundly: Phases in the development of the understanding of faith in the cultural proximity of the founder. In the case of Catholicism, this taking up of the original inspiration means a return to "*vita apostolica*", living like the apostles of Jesus. Often, this inspiration is first taken up in religious orders such as the Benedictines, Cistercians, Franciscans, Dominicans. In their early times, these began in their own way to renew the Church as the bearer of the faith. And there are indeed phases in the history of the Church in which these Orders have saved the Church precisely through this paradox of renewal by going back to the sources. Renewal also requires an openness to *internal dialogue* and thus to pluralism and doubt. In Catholicism this would therefore mean that together with the intra-religious dialogue within Catholicism one also conducts an ecumenical dialogue with other Christians and their churches.

The history of Catholicism also shows that a strong religion needs just the praise of doubt and the search for truth, which at the same time remains a horizon. As in science, so also in religion the truth remains infinitely much more comprehensive than our findings - even if we take our findings quite seriously. Religion flourishes where there is a climate similar to the spiritual climate of the Renaissance. Doubts about beliefs should not be seen as weakness, but as a strength.

Catholicism is characterized by a capacity for renewal with at least two other components. First, there is the Catholic juxtaposition. By this I mean: in the case of a new development

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<sup>2</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel (died 1972) was a conservative rabbi, Jewish scribe and religious philosopher of Polish origin. He says: "Ultimately, religion is not based on the human consciousness of God, but on God's interest in man. In prayer man does not seek to make God visible, but to make himself God visible. Man does not seek to understand God, God seeks man and even needs him: "To be is to mean, and the meaning of man is the great mystery of being God's partner. God needs people". (Wikipedia)

Catholicism does not immediately say: 'either - or', but says: 'and - and'. A choice between old and new faith practices is not made quickly. The starting point is rather: let the alternative form of the understanding of faith and the practice of faith first grow through the discipleship of Jesus and the apostles beside the already existing one, without making the understanding of church and faith entirely dependent on the new understanding. Secondly, Catholicism renews itself like a big tanker: with the help of the sociological law of the slowing leadership. By 'slowing leadership' I do not mean church leadership, but an objective mechanism. The slowness of its development in the case of Catholicism sometimes looks like weakness, but it is at least also a strength.

The Catholic tradition in Christianity certainly advocates interreligious dialogue. Here some remarks.

The starting point for interreligious dialogue for Catholicism is the publication of the Declaration "*Nostra Aetate*" of 1965. The following principles for dialogue are formulated.

- All human beings are created by God and have human dignity;
- all human beings are seekers of meaning;
- Religions formulate and answer questions about meaning;
- Freedom of religion is part of human dignity;
- Religions should be able to develop freely at the social level, based on legislation that guarantees freedom. This means that social and cultural pluralism is accepted; the Catholic Church today advocates political and legal freedom of religion.
- But there is no theological equivalence of all religions. Especially in the area of the ways of salvation there is no equivalence. A religion is better, so to speak, to the extent that it comes closest to the truth about God.
- Theologically the Catholic Church in the area of interreligious dialogue is not pluralistic but inclusive. That means: other Christian denominations and just other religions know to different degree parts of the religious truth. In other words: Catholicism understands itself as true religion and true church of Christ, but it does this in such a way that it also refers on several sides to partial consensus with other traditions. And exactly this multilateral partial consensus gives a positive basis for dialogue, because there is already a "common ground" without complete consensus.
- Thus, the church has left the so-called exclusivism. With this view it saw itself as the only right religion which must completely replace all other religions. This was particularly important for the relationship with Judaism. Christianity is a later form of monotheism than Judaism, but it does not replace Judaism. Perhaps a similar approach would also be fruitful for interreligious dialogue on the part of Islam?
- Specifically, in relation to Islam, the Catholic Church has formulated that it is in agreement with seven essential elements of Islam, such as: monotheism, Hadj, fasting.

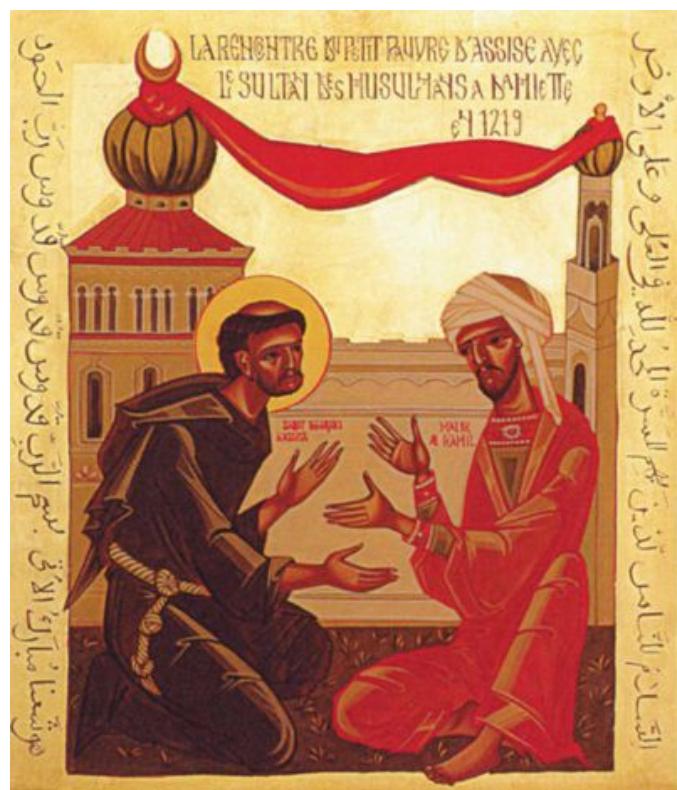
5. My fifth thought. An important issue within the interreligious dialogue is the relationship to human rights. After the French Revolution, the Catholic Church was traumatised in the field of human rights, because the French Revolution was based on its anticlericalism. But in 1963 Pope John XXIII wrote an encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris*, in which he accepted human rights as formulated by the United Nations, without creating his own variant of human rights. Pope John XXIII answered only to the preamble of the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights), in which human dignity is called without being justified ethically or theologically - because, the editorial commission among others with the French philosopher Jacques Maritain<sup>3</sup> and the Dutch Marga Klompé, who later became the first female minister in Holland, thought that the justification had to start from cultures and religions and be formulated: bottom up, so to speak. After the acceptance of human rights followed in 1979 the encyclical letter *Redemptor Hominis* of Pope John Paul II, where he deepened the justification of human rights by basing it also on the Incarnation of God. This is a classic example of Catholic renewal: very slowly how to turn a mammoth tanker, but also very solidly: through the two Popes human rights have moved from the periphery of faith to the center of the understanding of faith. This now leads to the fact that the Church everywhere in the world promotes human rights through its commissions *Justice and Peace*. Both the juxtaposition and the mechanism of the slowing leadership give me hope that this is also possible in other religions. But they would have to start with it themselves. And - let us be honest: The acceptance of human rights within Catholicism is indeed authentic, but not without complications until today. If one, like the Catholic Church, accepts human rights as an element of a political order and as the basis of a constitutional state, this means on the one hand that the Church enjoys the freedom associated with human rights vis-à-vis the state. On the other hand, however, it is encouraged by the same human rights to carry them out internally. This is not possible without further ado, for example in the area of the consecration of women to priests or deacons. Here one sees that the renewal can also function as a brake by taking up the original inspiration: it is to be proved that in the early church there were also female priests and consecrated deacons - otherwise the consecration is not sufficiently theologically legitimized. The modern experience that the exclusion of women from spiritual offices is a discrimination and violation of their human rights is indeed a strong impulse for the study of tradition. But the legal freedom of religion, which also expresses a human right and also refers to the institutional aspects of religion, prevents the intervention of the state or society in the church. Therefore, one needs content-wise Christian argumentation or content-wise Muslim argumentation for the change of practice. And that is quite so. I am telling this here and now because I do not want to give the impression that Catholicism has already achieved what Islam or other religions should still do. It is true: Catholicism accepts human rights as a component of the political order much further than Islam, but also not without limitations and complications. This can be seen in the area of the consecration of women and by the way also in the area of freedom of religion within the church. One may indeed change one's own religious conviction without having to fear for life,

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<sup>3</sup> Jacques Maritain (d. 1973) was a French philosopher who worked as a French ambassador to the Vatican on the text of the UN Charter of Human Rights.

but the innovators of the church have often had a rather difficult church life; also, the pluralistic juxtaposition has its limits. Nevertheless, I think it is very important that all religions speak out in favour of UDHR as formulated by the UN and develop their own justification for it. If this is not done, a commitment to peace is largely incomplete. I would like to invite you to formulate your thoughts.

6. Sixth, the basis for interreligious dialogue on human rights lies in a religious anthropology: all human beings have been created by God in His image and likeness. So, all have a soul that connects them to the transcendence of God like a hinge. At the same time our status as image of God is a reason for the acceptance of human dignity and its absolute character. Human dignity is also the reason for the recognition of human rights. Human rights are the international legal implementation of human dignity. I would also like to advocate this for religions other than Christianity. I think it would really be a contribution to world peace if all monotheists in the world were to sign the universality of human rights, not as a compromise in the space of a foreign culture, but from the basic conviction that all human beings were created by God in His image, from which human dignity and human rights follow. So, a common search for human rights can certainly lead to theological exchange.



A picture of the meeting of Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malek Al-Kamil in Damietta / Egypt at the time of the 5th Crusade in 1219. It was a conversation about peace and faith between a Christian and a Muslim.

# **CONFLICTS BETWEEN RELIGION AND POLITICS**

## **Power and Misuse of Power**

### **Theology in Turkey at the Crossroads of Religion and Politics**

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#### **Introductory remarks**

In this article I try to present the tensions between politics and religion in Turkey from a socio-historical perspective, which have been perceived in the field of theology in recent years.

Societies are like organisms (Spencer). Every change of one part of the organism can have effects on the other organs or on the whole body. The effect can then be felt as serious if this change is disturbing. In the long run, disturbing changes that emerge on different social levels, such as economic, legal, political, religious, etc., affect societies as a whole and/or the groups or persons directly affected by these changes in different ways. Such effects can also be perceived in other social systems. No disturbance in a social system is experienced isolated from the other systems.

Religion is also a system with an important social dimension (See: Luhmann, 1982; Berger, 1993). Despite the widespread assumption that religion is a private matter in the context of faith and the relationship to the highest existence believed, to God, and despite secularist and laicistic notions of treating it as a private matter, it is clear that religions are always systems with an important social impact.

Religion is at the same time a paradigm of a worldview (see: Valk, Albayrak Selçuk, 2017) that shapes people, society and culture. Every essential change in this paradigm can lead to a disturbing consequential effect in social systems. In addition, an effect that triggers a change in a religious paradigm can have different effects, depending on whether it comes from within, i.e. from religion itself, or from outside, from other influences. Such reactions can trigger conflicts within a system or between several systems. From this perspective, minor or major religious tensions are a possible part of life. Religious conflicts can therefore be caused by religion or be based on religious purposes. Or religion is instrumentalized in already existing conflicts. Such conflicts can also be internal and/or interreligious and arise between religion and other social systems. These conflicts have effects on individuals and social systems, regardless of whether they stand for a particular group or not. Not a single part of the organism can be spared from these conflicts.

It is not wrong to say that the history of every religion is also a history of conflict. Isn't the actual goal of the (one) religion basically a new orientation or improvement of the life of faith and of the whole life? Isn't it the purpose of religion to shape people's faith, worship and way of life as God has intended? If so, then the history of religion can be seen as the history of the disputes about the corrections of "false teachings and practices" in matters of faith. It is a fact that such disputes take place between religion and other subsystems of society, as is the case throughout history between the denominations of a religion and religions.

At this point it should be noted that there is a close relationship between the orientation of faith and the improvement of life and those who rule. It is about the exercise of power: if someone has power, he or she may rule, and if one is in government, one rules. And both governance and the exercise of power are closely related to politics. That is why there is a close connection between government and religion, or government and religious conflicts.

The history of Islam (of Muslims) is full of internal Muslim debates that basically revolve around central questions of politics and power. The same applies, so or somewhat differently, also to other religions. For Muslims this began with the democratic election of the first Khalif Hz. Ebu Bakr (632 after Mohammed's death) and developed further after the fall of the third Khalif Hz. Osman (644 - 656) and became a violent conflict. Such conflicts took place and still takes place now and then peacefully or violently.

### **Modernization and Westernization in Turkey and the Struggle between Religion and Politics/Power**

It is well known that the relationship between religion and politics has changed with modernization. New conditions have also emerged in the relationship between religion and science, religion and society, and religion and the state. One can even claim that the new conditions bear the name of modernization. This has given the western world superiority, especially in the scientific field compared to the eastern world. One can recognize a relationship between the military defeats and the land losses of the Ottoman Empire to the West and the successes the West has achieved in modernity. Towards the end of the 18th century, the relationship between religion and science was discussed, followed by religion and society and religion and state. (See: Berkes, 2002) During these developments, there was a constant conflict between traditional religious understandings and their institutional representatives and those who wanted to build institutions based on a Western understanding of religion.

Religion was seen as the reason for the backwardness in science and technology. Therefore, the aim was to develop the relationship between religion and science and administration in the direction of Western experiences. In conservative circles, however, this was vehemently rejected. In their view, the main reason for backwardness or failure is not religion itself, but the divergence of religion, its misunderstanding and the inadequate practice of religion.

Probably one of the main causes for the religiously motivated conflicts in Turkey lies in this discussion.

### **The Victory of the Western/Modernist Approach and the Conservative Struggle for Power**

The quest and aspirations for modernization that began towards the end of the 18th century in the Ottoman Empire proclaimed their victory in the first quarter of the 20th century in the founding of the Turkish Republic. In the course of this modernization process, the previous religious institutions and foundations lost their dominant influence on the educational system. The place of the traditional-religious was taken by scientific-modern education. Instead of traditional religious educational institutes, modern schools were opened. New institutions were created to provide modern religious education: In 1924 a theological faculty was established in Istanbul in "Darul'I-Fünun" ("House of Sciences", founded in 1900). Imam Hatip schools (schools for prayer leaders and preachers) were also established in various cities. These teachers were responsible for the religious education of secondary school 1. For religious affairs, a new state institution was formed, the Presidium for Religious Affairs (Diyanet).

In addition, new steps were taken to lead the newly founded Turkish Republic to a secular state system: The Sultanate and the Caliphate were abolished (1924). The Medres, the traditional religious schools, were also closed (1924). The article "The religion of the state is Islam", which was still in the constitution in 1924, was deleted in 1926. All these events were rejected by the conservatives, who were against modernization. But the new government left no room for these reactions.

But one could also notice developments which made clear that the government of the new Turkish Republic was not against Islam, but only against the prevailing understanding of Islam, which was responsible for the backwardness of the country towards the West. The establishment of higher and secondary schools for religious education, although the traditional religious schools (Madrasa) were closed, the establishment of the Presidium for Religious Affairs, or the retention of the Koran courses, the translation and interpretation of the Koran into Turkish with state funds, and finally the translation of the Tecrid-i Sarih (Hadith) are examples of the new state giving Islam a value as a religion. Consequently, it can be said that at the centre of the Islamic policy of the new Turkish Republic was the intention to offer religious education in a system in which reason and science were united. But this was an unacceptable approach for the then traditional conservative Muslim view.

Another important development in the context of relations between religion and state began. It influenced the continuing religious conflicts: the enactment in 1925 of the Law for the Abolition of Takkas and Zaviyas, which closed all Takka and Zaviya, the monastery-like Dervish houses, and prohibited them from all forms of religious status, including designations and

dresses. Takkas and Zaviyas were social institutions in which the Sufi-Islamic interpretation was learned, taught and lived.

Previously, in 1924, as already mentioned, the Maschihat (Office for Shaikh al-Islam - the highest authority for Islamic affairs in the Ottoman Empire, which represented the scholars and directed and controlled the educational system) was established. Shaikh al-Islam was a member of the government from the 19th century) and the madrasah was closed. And thus, the traditional religious scholars were kept away from the new system. With the abolition of Takkas and Zaviyas, in turn, the aim was to remove the socially widespread representatives/predecessors and institutions of popular Islam from the new social and political system.

The attempts to eliminate these institutions, however, could never lead to their extermination. It can be said that the goal of removing them from the system and their ending as a legal corporation was formally achieved. However, new illegal, underground structures were created, dedicated to the continuation of the traditional religious education of the Medresse and to the fight for the maintenance of Sufi Islam. Thus, the madrassas in various regions of Turkey, especially in eastern and south-eastern Turkey, have been able to continue their traditional religious education and continue to do so until today. Some scholars such as Suleyman Hilmi Tunahan (ges. 1959) and Said Nursi (1878-1960) and their followers have maintained traditional religious education as an alternative to state religious education. The Derwish orders, i.e. the closed Takkas and Zaviyas, have since existed as legally unrecognized, illegal civil communities.

Strangely enough, relations of different kinds were occasionally established between the state and the institutions of these two religious directions, Sufis/Tarikas and Madrasa. These relations, however, were based on the legal denial of such institutions. In spite of the existing relations, legal measures were occasionally taken to eliminate such institutions. Sometimes police measures were used, but sometimes attempts were made to persuade them to integrate into the system. The institutions could not, however, be regarded directly as non-existent on the political side. The political parties needed the votes of these groups. They maintained contact with them, even if they were not officially regarded as interlocutors. On the other hand, it played a role that the religious institutions knew that their legally forbidden activities could be ignored by the state and that this should remain so, because they had power through their votes and wanted to get places in the state apparatus with the help of this power. This process took place through mutual intrigues, which is still the case today.

The most important consequences of this historical process, namely that the mentioned points of party and state policy were aimed at determining religion both in content and institutionally, are that the conflict potentials between both sides increase and that the civil-religious institutions look for more possibilities to gain more power vis-à-vis the state or in the state apparatus. At least this is what Turkey's experience shows us. In Turkey, for example,

religious institutions that are not legally recognised as corporations have been able to continue their existence and influence on religious education as an alternative to state religious education through their contacts with political parties and, above all, with the ruling parties. These religious institutions, although illegal, were able to bring representatives to parliament as deputies. Through their contacts, they were assigned seats in various state institutions. Of course, it is quite normal for a person who belongs to a religious group to be elected as a Member of Parliament or to work as a civil servant or employee in state institutions. The aim here is only to make it clear that this is achieved through secret or illegal contacts with institutions not recognised by law.

### **The struggle of religious groups for the state authorities and the seizure of the state apparatus**

All religious groups that are not legally recognized, however, used - as already mentioned above - the possibility to extend their power and to continue that effectively. They aimed at this and sometimes tried by means of politics to get positions in state institutions and to act there in such a way that they could continue to live undisturbed and if possible supported. But some of the other religious groups wanted to control the state apparatus with different strategies or govern it themselves. Some of them tried to achieve their goals legally, for example as a political party or with the help of political parties. In this sense, it is known that the Halidiye, an offshoot of the Nakshi order, has been trying for years (see: Karpat, 2013) to seize the state and to influence the state apparatus through politics or even to take over the government in order to assert its Islamic ideology or at least to eliminate Islam-foreign and Islam-adverse ideologies and politics. During the reign of the Anavatan Party under the leadership of Turgut Özal (died 1993), this branch of the order took its first successful steps (Özdalga, 2007, 56). It is also known that through its relations with political parties such as the Democratic Party, Adalet Party and the two other parties following them, the Nur Community has been able to achieve some of its goals. Also Milli Görüş tried with several political parties, which were mostly founded by Erbakan (ges. 2011) and his colleagues under different names, to influence the state policy in order to achieve their religiously oriented purposes. The current governing party Ak Parti is also on this path.

The relations of the religious groups to the political structures on the basis of Milli Görüş (see: Aşgın, 2018), like the Milli Selamet Party to the Ak Party, were very different compared to the relations of the other previous parties. Previous relations between religious groups and political parties had been concluded more on the basis of mutual profit. The parties wanted to win the votes of the members of the group - the groups, on the other hand, wanted their illegal existence and activities to be tolerated and they wanted to get some jobs in the state apparatus, e.g. as deputies etc., in order to gain advantages from the state. With Milli Görüş and through parties on this line and especially with the Ak Parti, these relations have gained a very different orientation: In spite of the differences, they together represented an Islamic ideology. This time, the religious groups that were able to establish good relations with Ak Parti

had the opportunity to influence the social systems religiously via the state apparatus. This fact led to new developments in the relations between religion and politics/state. Such developments have repercussions in many social areas and institutions, especially in general and religious education and also in the study of theology. But before I talk about it in detail, I would like to draw your attention to an event in Turkey that is an important example of relations between religious groups and politics/state: the FETÖ coup attempt.

As is well known, Turkey experienced a very regrettable attempt of a military coup on 15 July 2016. This coup was carried out by the members of the FETÖ who were military commanders. But what does the FETÖ coup attempt have to do with religious groups and religious conflicts? The answer to this question will become clear when we understand: "What is FETÖ and what has it done?" After the coup attempt, FETÖ became the name for the Fethullah Gülen community, previously known as a religiously oriented group. It is the abbreviation for the terrorist organisation Fethullahs in Turkish: Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü. The Gülen community was a branch of the Nurculuk movement, which originated in Turkey at the time of the Republic and which does not recognize the legal policies of the state regarding understanding religion and religious education. The founder is Said Nursi. Under the Nurculuk movement there are other groups with different names and directions. Fethullah Gülen formed an independent group through his rhetoric, views and activities, but above all through his preaching. He became an international economic and political power by founding schools in Turkey and in many countries of the world and the economic system connected with that- Or: He was made to this power. Through this power and the people graduating from these schools, he successfully gained positions in politics and in state systems. In this process he gained important positions in some state bodies in Turkey. These bodies include the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education and the military. In the beginning, this group wanted to provide positions in state authorities for its supporters, but over time a different policy developed or it became clear that it wanted to rule over these bodies, so that hardly anyone but its supporters could get an (important) position. FETÖ had gained prestige and power at the national and international levels through religious and ethical discourses, education in schools, the people who were trained there, economic power and political and administrative relationships.

When it was clear to the state, or the ruling party and its leadership, that the FETÖ supporters held many important offices and positions in different state bodies in order to rule there and try to give others little chance, the state tried to prevent this and, if possible, to eliminate it. This was the beginning of the conflict. The government took measures against the parallel FETÖ structures in the state organs. Therefore, FETÖ tried to carry out a military coup to stop the government's actions against them and to keep the won seats. It tried to gain the leadership of the state by illegal exercise of power. But the coup attempt failed because of the resistance of the people, as is known.

The FETÖ coup attempt had some effects on religion in general and on theology in particular. These are addressed below.

### **The impact of tensions between religion and politics on theology**

The climate of conflict between religion and politics described above, the beginnings of which date back to the end of the 18th century and run through the entire history of the new Turkish republic, has consistently influenced theology. There was a division and a mutual distrust between the two sides. The purpose of politics and educational policy was always to create an understanding of Islam by means of theology that was oriented towards reason and science. Religious groups, on the other hand, tried not to join this understanding of Islam and to exert influence on politics.

The fact that in recent years the religious groups in Turkey have come to the government through political and democratic processes and/or have a say in state systems has had different results. Some of them can be found at political and administrative levels. Others are economic. And some in other different areas. The effects in the field of theology concern religion and religious education.

The picture I tried to present at the beginning of my paper points to the following in terms of religion and religious education:

The religious policy and the policy of religious education of the new Turkish Republic was oriented in theory and practice against the traditional understanding of religion of previous times and its religious education and its institutions. It attempted a reason-oriented religious education in scientifically oriented educational institutions. Unfortunately, however, its implementation did not go as planned and was unsuccessful. For, the modern educational institutions planned and established at the beginning for religious education could not survive long: the theological faculty in Istanbul existed for only nine years and the Imam Hatip schools at different sites existed for a maximum of six years. During their existence they were also not operated productively.

Theoretically and politically, the new theology or religious education was to produce a new understanding of religion. This new understanding of religion should no longer be based blindly on tradition, but directly on the Koran and the sahih/authentic Sunna, it should be oriented to reason and should take place in Turkish language. The representatives and followers of the traditional understanding of religion and religious education were pushed aside. Also, the mystical institutions, the Tarikah, which represent the traditional understanding of Islam of the people, were closed including their structures and representations. However, as I have already mentioned, these could never indeed be destroyed. In some way they continued their existence and tried to be politically effective. In recent years they have even ruled over politics democratically and have had a great influence on government, especially in the fields of theology and religious education.

Today, the ruling conservatives, consciously or unconsciously, are in conflict with the Republic's religious understanding and education, which did not suit them. In other words, they continue the struggle to which they have long devoted themselves, but now at the state level. The first target of the debate is modern education and modern approaches to religious education and their representatives and advocates.

In this context, it can be observed that there is a search for the revival of the medrese. The theological faculties of the Republic are being questioned with regard to "being Islamic". A theology that centers on reason, science and the Koran and seeks approaches to them is strongly criticized. Discourses that demand more attention for mystical insights in theology and religious education are becoming more and more heated. On the one hand there were efforts to make the names and the program of the newly opened faculties of theology more Islamic, but on the other hand the theological faculties were questioned with regard to their "Islamic being" and stamped as insignificant. Knowledge, theories and results based on them, especially in the field of religious education and didactics, are treated "from an Islamic perspective". The Faculty of Theology at Ankara University serves as a target for the discussions. For it is the oldest and most fundamental Faculty of Theology. It is regarded as the source and representative of Islamic theological approaches in Turkey, which is oriented towards reason, science, the Koran and Sunnah. Fundamental knowledge, ways of thinking and methodology in the field of theology in Turkey often come from this faculty. Especially in religious education and didactics this is very obvious. Therefore, the faculty and especially the Chair of Religious Education are excluded by conservative circles. The only way out of this new field of tension is to continue to generate knowledge.

On the other hand, the FETÖ organisation caused problems in the field of theological knowledge. These problems came to light in two ways: First, dealing with issues in the field of religion and especially inter-religious relations, to which the supposedly religious group FETÖ had previously devoted itself, can lead to being condemned as a FETÖ supporter if one opens up to this field. For example: issues such as inter-religious relations, inter-religious education or pluralism are associated with FETÖ. Therefore, even texts written before the FETÖ escalation are questioned as to whether their authors were FETÖ supporters or at least had a relationship with FETÖ, even if at the time of this scientific work there was no FETÖ at all. Second: Theological and religious-educational knowledge, thinking and discourses that in the field of religion and religious education do not conform to tradition or contradict the discourses and goals of the politically ruling Islamic conservatives can also be questioned as to whether it is also about FETÖ membership.

Such tensions and disputes in the field of theology and religious education make it difficult in theology to generate knowledge in certain areas or to spread and defend existing knowledge.

## **Summary**

Conflicts associated with social systems show their effects in all areas connected to them. As long as the intensity and violence of the conflict does not hinder others, there is no problem. This also applies to the fields of religion and theology.

Turkey's experience, however, points to the following: At state and political level, pressure is exerted to rule over religion, to take appropriate measures to exclude religious groups, not to admit them and to deprive them of their understanding of religion. This ensures that legally illegal religious groups are formed. It is not easy to deal with these groups that operate illegally. Above all, they can block political power relations.

Some religious groups, such as the FETÖ, dare to exploit social systems such as the economy and education to rule the state in a legal way and even to take over the state illegally and by force if necessary.

Some religious groups that have been excluded from the state/regime for years tried to continue their existence and be effective through politics. They could finally come to the government in a democratic way through pressure on the state and the parties and then question the religious issues that had been worked on for years. However, this is an obstacle to a rational and knowledge-based development in the field of religion and religious education. Theology and religious education, which cannot further develop secular approaches and implementations, experience the same situation as conservative approaches, which did not adopt scientific methods.

In my opinion, the solution lies in accepting rational and scientific procedures in the field of theology and religious education without neglecting tradition and maintaining the balance between religion or theology and politics or the state. The idea of the university is that it or its fields of science should develop the balance of two poles, namely between social theory and the theory of science. The state that finances the university now intends to use the university for its social purposes, including religion and theology. In terms of scientific theory, however, the university has the task of generating and teaching authentic knowledge. The balance between state and theology is at the meeting point of these two points.

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## Remarks on Religion and Politics in the USA

*Rev. Dr. Joshua Morris, Ph.D., B.C.C.*

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First, I want to express my gratitude to the SIPCC for this invitation to respond to Dr. Tosun's excellent, thorough, and historically rich work. Before I delve into my reflections and hopefully a prophetic nudging for us as caregivers and practitioners, perhaps a little background on me will prove useful in identifying from where I am coming. My scholarly work is interested in practical and pastoral theology at the intersections of liberation theology, cultural studies, critical theories, and political theory.

Therefore, I read Dr. Tosun's essay through those lenses. I want to take the deep wisdom of Dr. Tosun's essay and attempt a similar socio-historical analysis of how power is infused with religious ideology in my own country: The United States. Ultimately, I want to shine a spotlight on the ruling class, or what Dr. Tosun refers to as "ruling powers," and the possibility of cultivating an emergence of "the people." I follow Dr. Tosun's lead when he states, "In Turkey, for example, religious institutions that are not legally recognized as corporations have been able to continue their existence and influence on religious education as an alternative to state religious education through their contacts with political parties and, above all, with the ruling parties," (3) and I cannot empathize that fusion enough. Much of the masquerading of factions of evangelicalism (what I will refer to as the Religious Right) in the United States is an attempt to conceal the fact that power is *the* goal. More than an ethereal "power," it is perhaps more apropos to say the power is the facet of the Religious Right's cultural hegemony that seeks to sustain political dominance through consent.

When I was last with you all in Wittenberg in 2017 I spoke about the religious violence on our beloved LGBTQ+ community in the United States. Now, in 2019, those methods of exclusion and oppression are still commonplace and supported by the ideology of the Religious Right. With that in mind, I want to expand upon that example as it applies to a current instantiation of religiously supported violence: the separation of families at the United State's southern border.

It is necessary to examine how violence is infused and supported by religious ideology. For those who say we must keep religion and politics separate, I would say there is nothing more religious than politics, and nothing more political than the sacred. Returning to Dr. Tosun's work, he states:

The most important consequences of this historical process, namely that the mentioned points of party and state policy were aimed at determining religion both in

content and institutionally, are that the conflict potentials between both sides increase and that the civil-religious institutions look for more possibilities to gain more power vis-à-vis the state or in the state apparatus (3).

This is precisely what is happening at the southern border of the United States. Families that are seeking asylum through the legal process are treated as criminals and less-than-human. More than the absolute horror of these practices, the Religious Right supports these policies and seems to support them *on* religious grounds. Dr. Tosun is right: the Religious Right have abdicated the tenets of their faith and sold their souls for more votes. The Religious Right looks the other way because they seemingly see President Trump and his administration enacting conservative religious liberty policy issues (e.g., marriage and abortion). The buzzword used in these circles is “law and order.” The crisis at the border is *not* about the humanity of families; rather, the crisis at the border is about a country returning to “law and order.” In a recent Washington Post-ABC poll, 75% of white evangelical Christians rated “the federal crackdown on undocumented migrants” as positive. Speaking to the ideology around law and order, President Trump’s religious advisor, Paula White, declared that Jesus never “broke immigration laws.”

The response, so far, has sought to point out the scriptural errors to the Religious Right: namely, quoting passages, such as (amongst numerous Hebrew Bible passages), “learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17). The hope is that the Religious Right will exegetically come to their sense. This, however, will not work. The Religious Right *knows* those passages. Similar to Dr. Tosun’s analysis, then, it is *always* about maintaining power and cultural hegemony. Briefly, then, if that won’t work, what will?

### **What can we do?**

Now, I want to narrow my focus for us as scholar-practitioners. The question remains: what do we *do* in the face of corruption, religious bigotry, and violence. The clarion call for us, as practitioners, is to continue to represent the *people*. Returning to Dr. Tosun, he notes the FETÖ organization’s military coup attempt failed “because of the resistance of the people.” It is in this resistance, this cohort of bodies, which ferments the possibility of peace within hegemony. Following the imagery of hegemony: what is needed is a burgeoning counterhegemony. I close with one example of an emerging counterhegemony in the United States.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has voted to become a “sanctuary church body.” The denomination would be able to: “Respond to raids, deportations and the “criminalization” of immigrants and refugees; fight individual cases of deportation, press for the end of mass detentions and lift up immigrants’ voices; take “prophetic action” to extend “radical

"hospitality" to immigrants and immigrant communities." This is sanctuary. This is solidarity. It is about more than words. Secretary of the ELCA, Rev. Chris Boerger adds:

Until it really is a commitment for the congregations of this church, the prospects of this change are very dim. As a white church we say the right words. We, the majority population of this church, need to do more than talk.

My question for us is how we might have the boldness, vulnerability, and courage to continue to walk in these, and other, marginalized places in our contexts. What I hope to make clear is that, like the ELCA, boldness involves action. Words, scripture passages, and treatises are vital and perhaps set the tone, but without action and without being with *another* the care only goes so far. To just care for the individual – removed from these intersections – creates care that is reminiscent of a silo; nothing is connected, nothing is lasting. A solidarity that is lasting is joining *with* and journeying *along* the path with those affected by the aforementioned policies – whether in America or Turkey.

I will close with a word on vulnerability because the caregiving relationship profoundly opens both persons up to a place in which change is possible. Relationships change people. Through relationship I begin to *see* differently; I begin to *hear* differently, and lord willing, I begin to *act* differently. To overcome the power of religious violence, a step toward one another is a first step. For me, a glimpse of the liberative God of possibilities that I believe redirects us as caregivers to understand that theology is always anthropology. God takes sides with those on the margins.



# PERSONAL SPIRITUAL CONFLICTS

## Being involved in spiritual conflicts

*Professor Dr. Mary Rute Esperandio  
and Professor Dr. Kathleen J. Greider*

Our focus in this Seminar has been on how we as religious leaders and caregivers can be constructive agents of change in the work of conflict transformation and interfaith peacebuilding, especially in light of the power of our various religions. With our presentation we invite you to reflect with us on a particular aspect of preparing to be constructive, caring leaders in conflicted systems, that is, *preparing ourselves* internally, psycho-spiritually. Specifically, we ask you to turn your attention to conflict within yourself and try to care for it so that the conflict inside ourselves is less likely to interfere with the good work we want to do of transforming conflict and building peace systemically, relationally, and between religions and other expressions of human difference. Such an ambitious notion must start with and remain solidly planted in care and counseling of *ourselves*.

We have to remind us over and over that *we are religious leaders in conflict*, in at least four ways.

- We are leaders in *religious conflicts*: we have responsibility to intervene when religion is being used to do harm.
- We are *religious leaders*: we have responsibility to provide an example of how religion can be used to help ease conflicts.
- We are religious leaders, yes, but we are also *in the conflicts we are trying to transform*: systems theory argues that we are never outside the conflicts in which we try to intervene and, therefore, we have responsibility to change ourselves just as much as we ask others to change.
- Even though we are religious leaders, *we are, like all people, humans in conflict within ourselves*, including religious and spiritual conflicts: systems theory argues that our inner conflicts add to conflict in the systems of which we are a part and, therefore, to be effective leaders we have responsibility to address the conflicts within ourselves.

It is because of these multiple, major responsibilities that we ask for this focus on preparing ourselves to be leaders of conflicted systems and builders of peace. If we do not adequately prepare ourselves to be channels of the sacred power in our religious traditions, don't we risk impeding it? Some Christians express this by saying that G-d has no other hands or feet but ours. Also, we ask for this focus on preparing ourselves because embodying positive religious leadership in conflict transformation is an incredibly difficult, long, and sometimes lonely project. It requires persistence and courage, rooted in ever-increasing and self-questioning

consciousness of our own reactions, emotions, and values in the midst of conflict. But that consciousness must also be rooted in a gentle spiritual humility and growing spiritual maturity. We will use the term *self-reflexivity* to refer to these and other aspects of preparing ourselves.

Indeed, this is our main claim, *our thesis*: self-reflexivity about and transformation of our own religious and spiritual struggles is essential practice if we are to have a constructive effect in situations of conflict. Or put another way, *the question at the heart of our work* is: how can we prepare ourselves to be helpful religious leaders for transformation of conflict in light of our own inner religious and spiritual struggles?

In order to prepare ourselves to be leaders in conflict transformation and peacebuilding, we ask you to join us in acknowledging that being religious leaders does not make us exempt from being caught up in conflicts of many kinds, including inner conflicts. We ask you to help us create a space this morning where we can be honest that even as religious leaders, we have religious and spiritual struggles, a space safe enough to focus on those sorts of conflicts this morning. We ask you to reflect with us on those times when, despite the strength of our religious devotion and the faithfulness of our spiritual practices, we still struggle to live out the convictions we hold dear, perhaps especially in interfaith and other conflict situations.

Religious leaders are created as humans, not gods, devoted to peace but also limited by their humanness in the efforts to avoid adding to the conflict they seek to transform. We raise this delicate subject of our limited humanness and spiritual struggles because we respect that being religious leaders and caregivers exposes us regularly to very difficult situations that raise very difficult issues that are hard to bear alone. We open up this delicate subject as a way to offer care for your souls, which carry the weight of the countless conflicts for which you try to care every day of your ministries. We dare to speak of how hard it is to be a religious leader and caregiver in order to tell an often-unspoken truth: ministry tends to be characterized by a lack of equity and mutuality; *we put ourselves and our families on the line to serve, and the people and systems we serve tend not to do the same for us.*

We also want to acknowledge and affirm very strongly that context matters, always. The two of us offer our reflections from the particular and differing contexts of our education, teaching, and research in psychology and health, religion and spirituality, and care and counseling. For example, we use the term “religious and spiritual struggle” because it is common parlance in the international academic field of religion and health in which Mary does much of her research. It is a term that provides a way of talking about conflict that is intrapersonal and of special significance for religious leaders and caregivers. Similarly, we speak not of self-reflection but of “self-reflexivity,” because that term is widely used in Kathleen’s context of Christian theological education in North America. More than “reflection,” reflexivity calls for a long-term, intensive, analytical, honest, and self-revealing style of personal reflection crucial for integrity and ethics in spiritual life and ministry. And, overall, the presentation reflects values

and practices related to our feminist contexts, exemplified in our cooperative style of presentation and in our effort to make this presentation accessible, context-specific, participatory, and attentive to relationality, emotion, transparency, and aesthetics.

As presenters, all the ideas and practices we offer are grounded in our experience that all humans are both very much alike and very much different. We hope that some of what we say, as well as the self-reflexivity we ask of you, will be somewhat familiar to you. But we also know that because it is grounded in our contexts, some of it will not translate easily into your contexts—you will find some of what we say odd or even off-putting. Please be assured that we are not intending to generalize, only offer for consideration in your contexts what our contexts have taught us is important.

Context also matters in conflict and peace building, of course. Transformation of conflict and the building of peace differ according to differences of culture, power, advantage, and privilege. This is true in different parts of the globe and their language systems, in different racial and gender cultures, in different religions and other systems of power distribution, and in many other dimensions of context and culture. Indeed, the claims we make about what is helpful or healthy in conflict are made in the context of our religious, theological values. We will expand a bit on this aspect of context in a moment, since it is foundational to everything else we will say.

Our presentation is based on several central convictions that we will simply acknowledge here as assumptions, because we do not have the time to argue them right now. These assumptions, like the rest of what we say, are grounded in and informed by our personal, socioeconomic, and religious locations. Especially influential are our identities as Christians, our educations, our professional experience in caregiving, teaching, and research, and in our experience of human interaction. Again, if you have differing perspectives, we invite you to them by yourself.

- We assert that conflict is part of the sacred mystery of the creation. Conflict within ourselves, like conflict between persons and communities, is a given part of our created human nature.
- We assert that conflict exists in all cultures and that the dynamics of conflict are affected by power-laden cultural differences, including religious differences.
- We assert that conflict is an unavoidable result of the complexity that characterizes the creation.
- We assert that conflict is not necessarily sinful, not necessarily wrong or harmful.
- We assert that conflict becomes sinful when, through our actions or our neglect, conflict becomes unnecessarily harmful.
- We assert that religious leaders and caregivers have inner conflicts, just like every other human. Our dedication to religion does not spare us from conflict.

- We assert that as religious leaders we have a special responsibility to tend our inner personal conflicts so that we do not, by our actions or neglect, make conflicts worse.
- We assert that religious leaders, like all others, are obligated to practice good stewardship of the creation invested in our lives: we are called to care for, sustain, and use wisely the gift of life given to us.

The remainder of our portion of this presentation has four parts.

- A *case study*. We will tell you a portion of the story of a colleague in ministry, Rev. Edmundo, who will help us discern some nuance and common experience in the notion of religious and spiritual conflict.
- We will ask to engage in a period of *personal, private self-reflexivity* regarding your own religious and spiritual struggles. As you read the case study, please prepare for that personal and private time by opening your heart and mind to Edmundo and how he might be able to help you identify your own religious and spiritual struggles and your way forward.
- We will offer *some reflection on the case study* with an emphasis on learning from Edmundo about how we might move toward greater understanding and positive transformation of our inner religious and spiritual struggles and other conflicts.

### **A Case Study of Religious and Spiritual Well-being and Struggle: Rev. Edmundo's Story**

In the course of Mary's research in the area of religious and spiritual struggle, she had the opportunity to meet Rev. Edmundo (not his real name) through her students. Three questionnaires were completed by Rev. Edmundo: the Brief Religious Coping Activity Scale (B-RCOPE); The Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale (RSS), and; the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS). Rev. Edmundo was also interviewed by Mary's students, using a phenomenological method. He seemed to experience the interview as a relatively safe-enough space so that he could take the initiative to do the kind of self-reflexivity we are encouraging you to do. Thus, we will reflect on some of his remarks in the interview as an example for us to follow. The original research was in Portuguese language, so we are working here with translation into English.

Rev. Edmundo agreed to participate in this research project, and also gave permission to share his story with hope that his struggles will help others. Accordingly, we ask you not to focus too much on Rev. Edmundo but rather to approach his story as a doorway into yourself and consideration of your own religious and spiritual struggles. Edmundo's story is unique and different from ours. At the same time, we have some common struggles that shake us to our cores, especially conflicts in our families and in our religious communities.

Rev. Edmundo is Brazilian and 36 years-old, married and father of three little children. He has a college degree in theology and post-graduate training in family counselling, and he serves as the pastor of an evangelical Presbyterian church. He states that he believes in God and

characterizes himself as both a religious and spiritual person. In the course of his average week, he participates in many church services, biblical studies, and religious meetings. He also spontaneously prays many times a day.

Rev. Edmundo was admitted to a private mental health clinic in Brazil after attempting suicide, and he was diagnosed as suffering from depression and alcohol abuse. When describing his greatest stress in the past three years, Edmundo referred to “marriage complications [especially an extramarital affair in which his wife was involved] and conflicts with the local church.”

First it is crucial to note that, overall, Rev. Edmundo’s religious and spiritual life shows many markers of health and well-being. He is in a time of trouble, even to the degree of having attempted suicide, but at the same time he continues to show characteristics of religious well-being. For example, the Centrality of Religiosity Scale shows Edmundo to be “highly religious” in all five of the commonly-recognized dimensions of religious life: intellect; ideology; public practice; private practice; experience. In the interview, Edmundo confirms the centrality of religion for his identity and for his sense of meaning in life. Even if we would say it in different words, many of us can identify with him when he says that

Religion is very important to me. (...) [Religion] is about the encounter of the human being with God, who made the human being with the only purpose to be in relationship with Him. (...) God is the only source [of the power and initiative] that establishes a point of contact between me and Him. That is religion to me. (...) This is who I am, (...) body and soul.

Another indication of the health of a person’s religious life is that they make extensive use of positive religious coping strategies. Positive religious coping is characterized in the Brief Religious Coping Activity Scale with these markers:

- Looked for a stronger connection with God
- Sought God’s love and care
- Sought help from God in letting go of my anger
- Tried to put my plans into action
- Tried to see how God might be trying to strengthen me in this situation
- Asked forgiveness for my sins
- Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems

Rev. Edmundo’s responses resulted in a very high score (5.0), suggesting that his religiosity forms the basis of very positive coping skills when life presents challenges. Perhaps you share with him some of these characterizations of positive religious and spiritual life.

At the same time, Rev. Edmundo is experiencing significant religious and spiritual struggle. This, too, is a crucial point: the tests used in this study recognize that people with healthy religiosity can at the same time experience significant religious and spiritual struggle. We can be both religiously and spiritually healthy and still have times of trouble and suffering. Rev. Edmundo's struggles are in areas that create struggle for many of us—marital conflict and conflict in his religious community—both of which are areas of high religious and spiritual significance.

Rev. Edmundo took the questionnaire called The Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale, and one area it measures is *interpersonal struggles in the context of religious life*. Edmundo's response to questions about interpersonal struggles showed that his distress in this area is "very high" (5.0), as measured by five items:

- 1) "I had conflicts with other people about religious/spiritual matters."
- 2) "I felt rejected or misunderstood by religious people."
- 3) "I felt as though others were looking down on me because of my religious/spiritual beliefs."
- 4) "I felt angry at religious institutions."
- 5) "I felt hurt, mistreated, or offended by people who follow a religion or call themselves spiritual."

His response to questions about *moral struggles* showed that his struggle in this area is "high" (4.25), as measured by four items:

- 1) "I felt guilty for not living up to my moral standards."
- 2) "I was worried that my actions were morally or spiritually wrong."
- 3) "I wrestled to follow my moral principles."
- 4) "I felt torn between what I wanted and what I knew was morally right."

The RSS also measures *struggles with ultimate meaning*, using with these four items:

- 1) "I had concerns about whether there is any ultimate purpose to life or existence."
- 2) "I questioned whether life really matters."
- 3) "I felt as though my life had no deeper meaning."
- 4) "I questioned whether my life will really make any difference in the world."

We can see that struggle with any of these four items has power to undermine one's sense of value and will to live. This was the case for Rev. Edmundo. Though his struggle with ultimate meaning was "low" overall (2.25), his score was high (4.25) with regard to the second item: "I questioned myself whether *life really matters*." *The importance of this last item, in combination with his high level of struggle in interpersonal and moral dimensions, helps us move toward compassion and understanding of Edmundo's suicide attempt.*

## **Self-Reflexivity on Inner Conflicts: Our Own Religious and Spiritual Struggles**

We now ask you to join Edmundo in self-reflexivity on your inner conflicts. The purpose of our request is to give you opportunity to increase your awareness of your personal religious and spiritual struggles that might be significant—especially an impediment—as you try to help others in conflict transformation and peace building.

### **Analysis and Strategies**

We return now to Edmundo's story and to research in religion and health. On the one hand, many research studies (for example: Desai and Pargament 2015; Koenig et al. 2001; Koenig et al. 2012), including one in Brazil (Stroppa and Moreira-Almeida 2013), have demonstrated the correlation of religion and improved health outcomes. Religiosity that is well-integrated into the personality of the individual, along with a high use of positive coping strategies, as a rule, is associated with positive health impacts. It is correlated with higher quality of life, healthier outcomes in the resolution of spiritual struggles, and seems to lower the incidence of depression.

However, Edmundo's story reminds us that this is not always the case. *How can we explain the fact that a highly religious (4.8) individual, with high uses of positive coping strategies (5.0), has suffered severe depression and a suicide attempt?* The results of the questionnaires and research studies do not help us adequately to understand situations like his where a leader with healthy religiosity experiences worsening mental health leading to suicidality and other mental health problems. The centrality of religion in our lives and the very high use of positive coping strategies does not always help us adequately with our spiritual/religious struggles. It does not necessarily prevent depression or other mental health problems.

Thankfully, if we look more deeply into the *interview* with Edmundo, we can find additional understanding of what led to this very devastatingly conflicted period of his life. During his stay at the mental health clinic, Edmundo bravely engaged in a great deal of self-reflexivity. That reflexivity helped him come to deeper understanding of the roots of the conflicts in his life and also of how he could begin to build more peace in himself, his relationships, and his ministry. We can identify three areas where we see Edmundo's insights and strategies constellating. These three areas of conflict are not at all separate but are interconnected by a very poignant reality in Edmundo's reflection on his life: overall, he was realizing more consciously that his religious life, so central to his identity and well-being, is at the same time the very source of some of his suffering.

- Edmundo was hurt by the religious people and institutions to whom he gave his heart and his ministry.
- Edmundo's deepest religious convictions about human nature were betrayed by his experience of wrongdoing by other Christians (himself and others).

- Edmundo struggles to forgive those who do not seek his forgiveness.

### **Edmundo was hurt by the religious people and institutions to whom he gave his heart and his ministry.**

Edmundo felt called to a ministry of service to others. In Christianity, there is a long and strong tradition that faithful ministers serve others without expectation of being served in return. Because they receive divine love freely, Christian ministers are expected to love and serve others freely. And because Christianity teaches that G-d loves us even when we do not love G-d in return, Christian ministers strive to give love to others even when they do not show love to us, even when others mistreat us. This is what Edmundo does—even when members of his religious community mistreat him, Edmundo tries to love as freely as G-d loves. Indeed, he has been taught that it is his moral responsibility as a Christian minister to set this example. But over time, this becomes a life-threatening conflict, because he is not G-d and cannot always love as G-d loves. Over time, the gap between what he gives and what he receives causes him more and more sadness, loneliness, and resentment. Eventually this conflict grows to feel like a death and a grave and that other Christians are burying him. Because it is difficult to translate his Portuguese concepts into English, we offer a photo to enhance the metaphor he uses.

I thought that the place I should find more comfort, affection and encouragement [the religious community], was the one that took advantage to throw over me an earth shovel and tell me: now it is enough, for good. And I ended up here [in the mental health clinic], against my will...The psychiatrist insisted a lot and thank God I came.



Research confirms that Edmundo is not alone in such desperate feelings. For example, research among Catholic Christian priests (Pereira 2013; Pinto 2012; Benelli 2006; Cozzens 2001) reveals that these priests tend to feel emotionally exhausted by the demands of being models of holiness and virtue because they do not receive proper institutional support from the church when they find themselves in situations of stress and suffering (Pereira 2013). Also,

there is research that reinforces Edmundo's experience that chronic conflict within the religious community correlates with a decrease in ministers' mental health. Lotufo Neto (1997) investigated the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among 207 Protestant and Pentecostal Christian ministers from São Paulo, Brazil and found that interpersonal struggles among members of the community of faith were the most frequent source of suffering among the ministers experiencing mental health challenges.

But most of us do not need research to convince us of this correlation. Many of us feel called as Edmundo feels called: to care for others generously and freely, even when we are mistreated, and to rely *ultimately* not on other people for our own care, but on the Divine. And we know from our own experience that neglect or mistreatment by our religious communities weighs heavily on our souls and causes us deep suffering. Even if our suffering is not as desperate as Edmundo's, this conflict at the heart of our service—inequity between the care we offer and the care we receive—evokes in most of us very human and difficult feelings in response: maybe isolation and loneliness, anger and resentment, even despair.

Much work lies ahead for Edmundo when he leaves the hospital and continues his search to find ways to make peace with the lack of mutuality at the heart of ministry. Those of you who work as chaplains or pastors can see here the important value of following-up with him after his discharge from the clinic. But in the following quote, we sense that Rev. Edmundo finds a deeply inspiring glimmer of his future direction when he discovers care in the clinic setting, coming from an unexpected source.

Maybe I feel exactly like a person who is not happy in the workplace, who is not happy in a public career, who is not happy thinking he is doing the right thing, even though he sees so many people doing wrong things. I feel frustrated to see so many people calling each other a brother without being a brother...And [then I] arrive here to treat my depression, and see an old lady with dementia who caresses my hair and tells me that she loves me, even though we have never met before.

Perhaps we can learn from Edmundo that one modest strategy for dealing with feelings of neglect is to look for unexpected moments of care from unexpected sources. They can touch us in surprisingly deep ways and help us feel closer to Divine love as well as help us maintain our hope in the human capacity to care.

### **Edmundo's deepest religious convictions about human nature were betrayed by his experience of wrongdoing by other Christians (himself and others).**

*Viktor Frankl* was a Jewish, Austrian psychiatrist and a Holocaust survivor. He became quite famous perhaps especially because of a profound insight born of his experience of death and life in concentration camps: persons are more able to survive even horrific suffering and

death-dealing conflicts when they can construct some sort of meaning within the suffering (Frankl 1984, p. 60). Contemporary research in religion and health confirms this now widely-affirmed insight.

Frankl does not claim that religion can always provide sturdy-enough materials for constructing meaning in the midst of suffering. But many of us, like Rev. Edmundo, have turned to religion in order to make meaning of suffering. But then, also like Edmundo, some of us have come to realize that the religious life that gives our life meaning can also be a source of suffering for us. This paradox can leave us quite disoriented and distressed and lead to a sharp decline in our sense of well-being until we are able to reshape our religious lives to make new meaning of suffering (Desai and Pargament, 2015). Like many Christians, meaning in Rev. Edmundo's life has been founded on the belief that humans have the capacity to be good and that religious people especially will do good. But then he experiences wrongdoing that strikes at the heart of his religious meaning and most sacred promises: he suffers a long period of feeling mistreated by other Christians in his work, he suffers the reality that even pastors and pastors' wives suffer breakdown of their marriages, and he suffers the abuse of alcohol. He says:

[my] wife's extramarital affair, in 2011, stirred up the structure of my being, after everything I believe and preach, it hurt so bad, so since 2011 I've started to try a little (alcoholic) drink to see whether it was good, and it was good... theoretically... Thank God we rose again, I love my wife, I forgive her, I understand her, she is the woman of my life, ... but the heritage [of this suffering] is still here, this drug called alcohol. That is not that absurd [to some other people], but it is to me.

These areas of suffering generated tension in central aspects of his life, all sacred to Edmundo. They struck at the heart of his religious meaning and they did indeed destabilize him—as he says, it “stirred up the structure of my being.” As he said in his interview, Edmundo realizes now that he had not yet been able to find “true meaning” for the suffering he was experiencing, leading him, as a consequence, to the desperate attempt to put an end to his suffering. As Frankl (1984, p. 76) observes, when we search for and create meaning, it can increase our ability to face suffering and even our happiness. “But if a person cannot find or create meaning in their suffering, the results may be fatal” (1984, p. 76).

At one point in the interview, the researchers asked Rev. Edmundo, “How do you understand the things that happened to you?” This question touched Edmundo very deeply now that his previous framework of meaning and values has been so undermined by his experience of being hurt by other Christians and his experience of how he and others betray their Christian values. He seems to know that he has to evolve religiously if he is going to return to health, and this becomes the strategy he offers us to cope with conflict wherever we find it. So now,

in treatment, Edmundo is trying to reshape his religious life to make new meaning of his religious suffering.

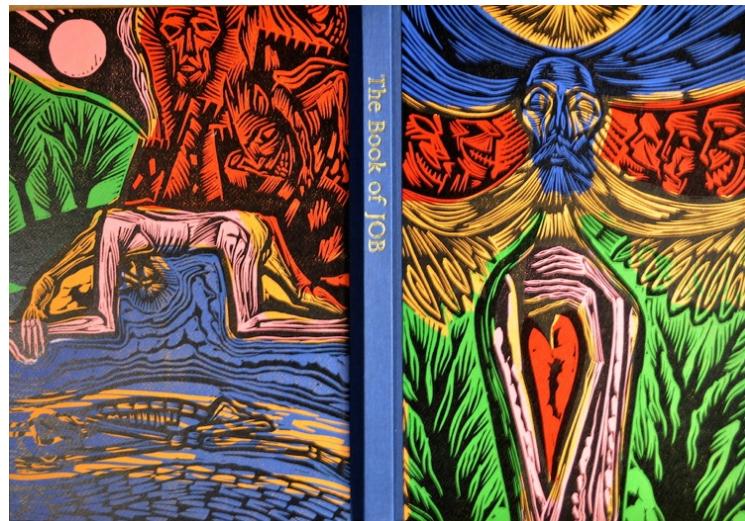
In the next two quotes, Edmundo shows us an example of this strategy—struggling to grow spiritually because of the prevalence of conflict and the destabilization of our religious beliefs. Now that he has ended up in this dire situation, he is struggling to grow his understanding of human nature, the hurt Christians cause, and his Christology (the function of Christ relative to our human nature). His Christian understanding now is that human suffering, sin, and evil is something innate to our beings and that for Christians, Christ “covers” our sin.

It is like...corrupted DNA and the only way to solve this problem is when Christ becomes the cover, the speciation, the cover between the eyes of God and our sin, he is ahead, he is the fair one.

In the next quote, Edmundo shows us even more what it looks like to struggle with our beliefs as a strategy for navigating conflict by growing continuously more spiritually mature and wise. His answer to the question “How do you understand the things that happened to you?” is not yet finished and polished, so it is not easy for us to understand. It takes time to construct new religious meaning, to renovate our religious spiritual home! But he has identified some of the materials and tools he needs to work with: relating personal suffering with concerns about evil in the world and developing his theology—Christology and theodicy (the relationship between conflict and the Divine). Rev. Edmundo explains:

There are three matters [possibilities to understand] about sin and God’s wrath. First, there are the terrible choices I made myself, right? And these choices will bring me consequences, but apart from that, there is a loving God who helps me find the better way out from all of this, because He loves me. [Second,] there is a consequence that comes from the evil one, from an evil being that comes to tempt me, to destroy me as it did to Job, right? Book of Job says this, he does not come to promote me, he comes to destroy me. And there is a third [way of understanding,] temptation that comes from God (...), what is the purpose of it? To take out the best of me. He is like a good teacher that cannot give tips during the test... but He wants to approve us...

It is fitting that he makes reference to Job and seems strengthened to find in Job’s situation the seriousness he experiences in his own—they are forces of destruction. Perhaps he also sees another parallel between his situation and Job’s: that YWHW, though a good teacher, cannot take the test for us. We must struggle to wrest from conflict some insight, a tentative direction, and then prepare ourselves for the next test. Transforming conflict whether inside ourselves or beyond is a test that is ongoing, a subject never to be fully comprehended, like the Divine power with which Job wrestles, as suggested in the following illustration.



*The Book of Job*, with Linocut Images by John Abell, The Old Stile Press, 2016

Rev. Edmundo's work on increasing his understanding cognitively and theologically is impressive and seems helpful to him. At the same time, he is also wise to recognize that understanding with his mind does not immediately lead to clarity in the midst of conflict. In conflict, we sometimes cannot see even where we are standing in the moment. As Edmundo says about his theological pondering: "of these three faces [possibilities to build meaning], I have not yet identified in which of them I'm living. Ask God to help me to recognize it soon."

#### **Edmundo struggles to forgive those who do not seek his forgiveness.**

The questionnaires used with Rev. Edmundo do not focus on forgiveness, and in his interview, he does not often use the word forgiveness. He spoke explicitly about forgiveness only when he spoke of forgiving his wife for her extramarital affair. Despite this limitation, we ask to reflect on forgiveness because forgiveness is such a challenging requirement in the transformation of conflict, forgiveness is considered a virtue in so many religious systems, and struggles with forgiveness are implicit in many aspects of Edmundo's story.

Much research has been done on forgiveness to confirm that it is a virtue that can improve well-being and enlarge the meaning of life. Studies have shown that health is affected positively by offering forgiveness to ourselves and to those who have wronged us, as long as forgiveness facilitates emotional regulation through stress relief, decreases the use of negative coping strategies, and increases the use of positive coping strategies (Witvliet and McCullough 2007; McCullough et al. 2009). A longitudinal study among romantic partners conducted by Van Tongeren et al. (2014) indicates that forgiveness correlates not only with meaning-making but also with restoration of meaning when it has been damaged by conflict between the partners. A study with 459 participants showed that when religiosity is central in our lives, it often supports us in our efforts to forgive others and to forgive God (Huber and Huber 2011). Research has shown that the capacity to forgive oneself correlates with better overall health—positive shifts in how we think, feel, and behave toward ourselves after committing an offense (Enright and The Human Development Study Group 1996; Hall and Fincham 2005, 2008; Exline

et al. 2011). Conversely, severe depression, allied to suicide attempts, confirms what some authors point out about the relationship between forgiveness, meaning-making, and health. For example, Sansone et al. (2013, p. 35) conducted a study with 304 inpatients of a mental health clinic and found that persons who have attempted suicide tend to have less experience of forgiveness than people without past suicide attempts. Importantly, this study measured multiple expressions of forgiveness—the study suggests that persons who have attempted suicide tend to have less experience of forgiving others but, even more, less experience of feeling forgiven and of forgiving themselves.

However, Rev. Edmundo's story and our own life experience make plain that there are also many complications and problems with forgiveness seldom addressed by the research but often necessary on the way to the transformation of conflict and peace-building.

- We are asked to forgive “the unforgiveable,” such as betrayal and other violations of our most deeply held values. In Edmundo’s case, this is a dynamic in his marital situation, where he has forgiven his wife but forgiveness can’t repair the broken vows and other damage done to the sacred state of their marriage.
- We are asked to forgive those who express no contrition for their wrongdoing and/or are not seeking to make reparation. These issues apply when forgiveness of G-d is at issue. In Edmundo’s case, though we do not know for sure, perhaps the disappointment, resentment, and misuse of alcohol he is suffering are exacerbated because those who have hurt him—his religious community, his wife—have not convincingly expressed their remorse and willingness to work to make things right. Also, his sense of identification with Job suggests that Edmundo struggles to rebuild his relationship with a G-d who expresses no regret for Edmundo’s suffering.
- We are asked to forgive others even when they have not forgiven us. In Edmund’s case, we know that Edmund feels he should forgive his wife, but we do not know if his wife is treating Edmund with forgiveness for whatever ways he has not honored the sacredness of their union. Perhaps, for example, like so many ministers, he regularly puts his ministry obligations ahead of the needs of his wife and children.
- We are asked to forgive ourselves, even if we are not clear whether or that we need forgiveness or what processes of confession and reparation might help us be more open to the healing power of holy acceptance. In Edmund’s case, he expresses feelings of guilt, born of not being able to do what he believes to be a duty. How does he forgive himself in such a situation? And even if he feels G-d’s forgiveness, it does not seem to have given him release from his guilt.
- We are asked to forgive in ways that make it seem as if forgiveness is something we ought to be able to do on our own. In Edmundo’s case, perhaps he struggles with forgiveness because, ultimately, it can be found only in relationship. Perhaps, as the following images suggest, forgiveness is found in community.



"Forgiveness." Four images by Ivan Shikarov, 1928-1999, Bulgaria

Forgiveness is a virtue precisely because it is so complex, difficult, and demanding. Forgiveness is multifaceted, elusive, demanding, and often painful. Given all these complications, and Rev. Edmundo's few comments on it, it is not easy to identify a strategy. We are bereft without more research on these complications, without more religious wisdom on how difficult it is to forgive ourselves when we have done harm, and to forgive those who harm us but do not seek to earn our forgiveness. Perhaps these four possibilities are starting points for us:

- Open our eyes and hearts to the many *complications* in forgiveness—do not expect quick healing.
- When we are leaders in conflict situations, strive to make space for genuine *apology* and trying to set things right—forgiveness will follow more easily.
- Study the Peace Charter for Forgiveness and Reconciliation and practice its wisdom, which is that compassion and recognition of our common humanity are the foundation of all genuine forgiveness and reconciliation.  
[\(<http://www.charterforforgiveness.org/charter/>\)](http://www.charterforforgiveness.org/charter/)
- Seek self-forgiveness by practicing *self-compassion*. Compassion for oneself is an essential corollary to any religious teaching about wrongdoing. If we emphasize that we have been created human and not god-like, created as limited beings who will inevitably do wrong, then we are religiously obliged also to emphasize compassion, not only for all others but for ourselves.

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## Appendix

### The Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale (Exline et al 2014)

At times in life, many people experience struggles, concerns, or doubts regarding spiritual or religious issues. On the list of items below there are no right or wrong answers; the best answer is the one that most accurately reflects your experience. Although we use the term "God" in several of the questions below, feel free to substitute your own preferred word for God (such as Higher Power) as you respond. Please select "not at all/does not apply" for any items that simply don't make sense within your belief system.

Within the past month, to what extent have you struggled with each of the following?						
		Not At All / Does Not Apply (N/A)	A Little Bit	Somewhat	Quite a Bit	A Great Deal
1. felt guilty for not living up to my moral standards						
2. felt angry at God						
3. had concerns about whether there is any ultimate purpose to life or existence						
4. felt hurt, mistreated, or offended by religious/spiritual people						
5. struggled to figure out what I really believe about religion/spirituality						
6. felt attacked by the devil or by evil spirits						
7. questioned whether life really matters						
8. felt torn between what I wanted and what I knew was morally right						
9. questioned God's love for me						
10. had conflicts with other people about religious/spiritual matters						
11. felt as though the devil (or an evil spirit) was trying to turn me away from what was good						
12. felt as though my life had no deeper meaning						
13. felt angry at organized religion						
14. worried that my actions were morally or spiritually wrong						
15. felt confused about my religious/spiritual beliefs						
16. felt as though God was punishing me						
17. felt rejected or misunderstood by religious/spiritual people						
18. worried that the problems I was facing were the work of the devil or evil spirits						
19. felt as though God had abandoned me						
20. worried about whether my beliefs about religion/spirituality were correct						
21. wrestled with attempts to follow my moral principles						
22. questioned whether my life will really make any difference in the world						
23. felt as though God had let me down						
24. felt troubled by doubts or questions about religion or spirituality						
25. felt tormented by the devil or evil spirits						
26. felt as though others were looking down on me because of my religious/spiritual beliefs						

## To take care of oneself in conflicts

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Ankara Sosyal Bilimler Üniversitesi**

Thank you, Professor Esperandio and Professor Greider, for an illuminating account on inquiring how to prepare ourselves to be helpful religious leaders for transformation of conflict in light of our own inner religious and spiritual struggles. The work raises some very key issues for me to take to a more psychological platform as we face in the counselling and psychotherapy world.

The work, with the help of a case study, contemplated on four themes for us to grasp what it would look like if we were to face our own conflicts; to self-reflect and care, while at the same time responding to conflicted systems.

- In response to the first theme authors point out; “we are leaders in *religious conflicts*”, counsellors also deal with conflict; as we mostly respond to conflicted individuals in their micro level conflicted systems.
- So much as religious leaders, we are *counsellors* existing and also practising within the conflicts we intend to transform, with the ideal to be living examples of what we try to achieve.
- And of course, various inner conflicts stemming from the system we exist confront us; including religious, spiritual, and mental dilemmas, weaknesses, problems as such.

To begin with, I would like to emphasize the two very common terms authors utilised: responsibility and self-reflexivity in responding positively to the inner and outer conflicts we are embedded in. What I understand from this is growth, is a process co-dependent to the type of conflict we encounter, as conflict does not guarantee self-growth if dealt unhealthily. It is because of this the case presented here brings so many questions around how much we are prepared, and equipped to help within and beyond when conflicted.

My claim is that being at the other side of the table, meaning *receiving* counselling, is an essential prerequisite in encouraging ourselves to face such conflicts within and beyond. The conflicts presented in Rev. Edmundo’s case is not alien to us as counsellors, to human beings essentially. First:

- Most of us, I believe, we are hurt by the clients and institutions we give our professional time and effort, at least one time.
- Our encounter to deepest issues and wounds of individuals suffering from mental illnesses touch back to our similar issues once we struggled through, or still live with. We try to resolve others’ issues while enduring the same problem home, or at work; and deep inside we betray ourselves by our own self-crudeness or neglect and vice-versa.

- As Edmundo struggles to forgive those who do not seek his forgiveness; we do struggle too, to find a place where we can leave our professional role aside, be vulnerable and seek care and compassion from others. At other times, we struggle to help others who do not utilize our time together as part of their healing; as if we are doing the wrong thing, inflicting insecurities within.

The list could go endless, for almost all of us. The question here is, why, of any other profession, these issues might make this group of people – people in the helping professions - more prone to inner-suffering and pain?

### **Our own psychological wounds**

One possible explanation to this comes from the Greek Mythology, the Wounded Healer - the centaur ‘Chiron’ symbolizes a healer archetype who cannot himself heal suffering from an incurable wound, but is capable of healing others suffering from trauma and psychic pain.

Developing a distinctive approach, Jung developed this phenomenon, emphasising “a good half of every treatment that probes at all deeply consists in the doctor’s examining himself...it is his own hurt that gives a measure of his power to heal. This, and nothing else, is the meaning of the Greek myth of the wounded physician” (Jung, 1951, p. 239). According to this paradigm, even if the analyst goes through a lengthy personal psychoanalytic process himself, he/she is still prone to the shadowy existence of his wounds when re-constellated working with similar wounds in similar conditions. In other words, counter-transference is now considered to be inescapable and even part of the therapeutic process of any healing relationship counsellors, psychotherapists, doctors or nurses develop.

Later on, the term expanded from there to shed more light into the psychological vulnerabilities healing professionals encounter in the past and present (Crystal, 2006). Maybe this is the very case why our professionals are already a risk-prone group to experience conflict inflicted in our relationships or values and beliefs where we build any meaning upon.

### **Research on the Wounded Healer Paradigm**

The notion of individuals entering into therapy because of their own wounds is now widely accepted, with accumulating evidence research offers.

Barr (2006) for instance, found 73.9% of therapists (out of 253) to experience one or more wounding experiences that led them to choose a career of counselling (Barr, 2006). Crystal (2006) suggests modern day therapists utilise their empathy within the concept of the wounded healer, using their own life experiences in the facilitation of improving the mental health of their clients. Gage and Goodman (1975) discuss that this pain has a limit and is not so impactful as to create a defensive personality. Norcross and Guy (1989) report qualitative

accounts of ten therapists' life journey in becoming healers, because of "their affinity with the healer-patient archetype" (p. 226).

A remarkable wounded healer example in Islamic culture could be named as Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Zakariya Al-Razi (ca. 865-925), who was a physician trained in Baghdad. He is told to have an eye-disease and became blind eventually; while at the same time refusing all types of treatment. His contributions to the science of medicine came from his own experience; utilising his wounds in understanding blindness and eye diseases that became a pioneering book of its age one day. His wounds granted him a better insight of his own suffering and led him to judge the effectiveness of present medicine until he tested them himself (Tibi, 2006).

Over the years, research has confirmed what we have known intuitively by heart, that our therapeutic bonding is the essential factor for positive outcomes. APA's (*American Psychological Association*) Society of Clinical Psychology identified main ingredients of empirically supported treatments, revealing "therapy relationship to make substantial and consistent contributions to psychotherapy outcome independent of the specific type of treatment," and that "the therapy relationship accounts for why clients improve (or fail to improve) at least as much as the particular treatment method" (Lambert & Barley, 2001).

Here I reflect on what Professor Esperandio and Professor Greider suggest, that our own past and present conflicts or wounds have the very potential facilitating our empathy and genuineness towards bonding to others, if only dealt healthy under professional accounts.

However, fast-paced lifestyles, lack of supervision and the demanding workplace system only add on the pile; revealing 48 % of the 1227 NHS (*National Health Service in Britain*) staff members to report depressive feelings in the last week at least one, or more. Compared to 2015 figures, the rates seem to raise by 10 %; indicating respondents to be in the bottom 61-80% of the population for wellbeing (BPS, *British Psychological Society*, 2017).

### **A way out or rather within?**

Adhering to the ethical standards of our profession, the quest for self-awareness is an essential part of reflective practice. It's not just our competence in our skills, knowledge and performance; but also, any personal conflicts or issues that might interfere with our ability to provide quality and effective service rely on developing a mechanism for analysing these different variables into thoughts, feelings and actions (AIPC, *Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors*, 2009).

Reflexive counselling requires the practiser to be mindful of these dynamics, within their limits and strengths - as much as possible. We believe reflective practitioners are aware of their own strengths and limitations. According to AIPC, and many other ethical guidelines in our

profession, there are many processes that contribute to effective reflective practice. Within the limits of today's reflection material:

1. Evaluating own performance
2. Developing self-awareness
3. Monitoring our potential for burnout
4. Ensuring adequate self-care

are some of the primary methods to achieve sustainable working standards and integrity towards the self.

### **Caring for our psychological wounds and struggles**

In response to my colleagues' suggestions on resources you could utilise dealing with the complexity of struggle and conflict; as part of your role as a religious & pastoral or spiritual counsellor, I would like to emphasise some of their suggestions and add a few other resources to find the right one that fits us.

1. First, we all need supervision (Geldard & Geldard, 2001);
  - a. that acts like a sounding board for concerns
  - b. to help us resolve own conflict, dilemmas and issues
  - c. to avoid burnout in what is an emotionally draining occupation
  - d. to examine our beliefs and attitudes regarding clients and therapy
  - e. to look out for overinvolvement and keep our professional boundaries intact.
2. Second, it is essential that we watch out for burnout and prioritise self-care, with an aim to ensure our mental, spiritual and physical health are all in good shape (Potter, 1987). To name a few, we are in need of:
  - a. keeping expectations realistic
  - b. reducing workload as much as possible
  - c. finding a relaxation spot at work
  - d. maintaining a balanced diet throughout the day
  - e. developing interests outside of work
  - f. recognising our own responses to management and workplace issues.
3. Thirdly, striking the best work-life balance is not easy but essential to reduce the stress of each and maintain our roles more balanced. Here are some ideas other professionals find helpful:
  - a. Keeping a journal: Write down everything you do for one week. Include work-related and non-work-related activities. Decide what's necessary and satisfies you the most. Cut or delegate activities you don't enjoy, don't have time for or do only out of guilt. If you don't have the authority to make certain decisions, talk to your supervisor.

- b. Taking advantage of options with different emotional hats on.
- c. Managing time. Organise household tasks efficiently and share responsibilities.
- d. Re-evaluating cleaning standards of the living space.
- e. Clear communication: Limit time-consuming misunderstandings by communicating clearly and listening carefully.
- f. Releasing guilt out of its cage for some time to let some peace in.
- g. Nurturing self.
- h. Unwinding after a hectic workday by reading, practicing yoga or taking a bubble bath; and avoid watching the news as it is reported to escalate anxiety and stress levels.
- i. Setting aside one night each week for recreation.
- j. Getting enough sleep.
- k. Creating a support system with trusted and joyful ones (AIPC, 2009, p.25-26).

### **A few lasting remarks**

Even if we have always achieved some of those activities of self-care, I highly doubt whether we could claim or testify that we healed someone suffering, for eternal, or we are perfectly healed throughout years of reflexivity or organised self-work. It feels dangerous to feel that we did so, like a guru we know the best for our clients coming from a knowing-already place, disregarding their uniqueness in the narrative that unfolds in a “I-it” way. The action needs to transform and transcend within, in a “I-thou” way, that healing is accomplished mutually, through meeting each other in a genuine encounter (Buber, 1965).

There is continuous need for personal development, and emotional self-care under a professional take on supervision for anything that trigger our own stuff we are blind to; either because we are too close to it, or drained emotionally (shame, disgust, despair, anxiety, and so on...). If we are not able to reflect or get in touch with our own vulnerabilities or conflicts, there is potential harm to ourselves, and in turn to our client load.

Hearing Rev. Edmundo’s case, made me feel all different emotions coming to surface; lurking in my own blood, feeling the grief and sorrow, and shame, hope and solitude. There are times I never have the courage to think of my own sorrow or anxiety in my personal relationships hearing so much betrayal coming from my own clients and supervisees. I self-reflect at all those times I felt betrayed by my own clients, and question whether I ever forgave them in real terms for wasting my time.

Here, I self-reflect on all of those feelings that are frozen or channelled through in all the rush to catch the next following task; in my narrative of “becoming”; which actually trapped me to the conflict of “unbecoming”. There is a complete war zone that’s going on in my battlefield.

And I know for sure that there's a choice we all have to make, and that is whether we want to live or die inside our hearts. At one point or another we all must face our fear and choose which direction we want to go.

Then Elliot's words rush to my mind and I sit with it:

"I said to my soul, be still and wait without hope, for hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love, for love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith, but the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting. Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought: So, the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing. I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where. And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time." (Passage II, Burnt Norton, 1943).

And Rumi concludes;

"Stay with it. The wound is the place where the light comes in..." .

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