Bridging the Divides

Post-conference publication on faith-based reconciliation and peacebuilding commemorating the 30th anniversary of „Reconciliatio et paenitentia” by St. John Paul II and the Year of Jan Karski
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Some consider reconciliation as an impossible dream which ideally might become the lever for a true transformation of society. For others it is to be gained by arduous efforts and therefore a goal to be reached through serious reflection and action. Whatever the case, the longing for sincere and consistent reconciliation is without a shadow of doubt a fundamental driving force in our society, reflecting an irrepressible desire for peace. And it is as strongly so as the factors of division, even though this is a paradox.

Reconciliatio et paenitentia, 3
About this volume

The originality of this proclamation is in the fact that for the church reconciliation is closely linked with conversion of heart: This is the necessary path to understanding among human beings.
Reconciliatio et paenitentia, 8

If it can be argued that religion contributes to conflicts all over the world, then logically, it must also have its part in a reconciliation process. With this thought in mind the Centre for the Thought of John Paul II organised the Bridging the Divides conference focused on whether religion might prove a factor in reconciliation processes after and beyond the solutions offered by high politics. The main question around which the conference evolved was what role does religion play in reconciliation processes and does it have a potential for peacebuilding which politics is blind to? Can a Catholic religious imagination shape the approaches, goals, and horizons of peacebuilders? To what extent is the figure of Jan Karski a source of inspiration?

The idea of peacebuilding is elusive and defies a straightforward definition. Understood as a process, it is not as easy as eliminating violence. In fact, the exact moment of terminating given conflict is often impossible to pin down. Furthermore, the efforts necessary for creating a durable peace are neither short-term nor finite. Thus, peacebuilding is an ongoing process, though with a specific purpose: to rebuild nations and communities torn apart by disagreement and to prevent recurrences of conflicts. This is also true of reconciliation. Fostering understanding between groups of peoples divided by violence and mistrust is a long-term undertaking which needs to be implemented on many levels. True reconciliation must not be limited to the political, social or economic spheres; instead it ought to encompass the spiritual realm too. Peacebuilding is a way of conflict transformation which strives to comprehend the nature of a conflict in its full range, including the deep historical roots as well as the personal and individual dimensions.

It is often asserted and accepted without proper analysis that religion is a cause of violence rather than a force for peace. In reality, religion has played an important role in peace processes because of the enterprising efforts of various religious actors. However, even if religion at times becomes part of the problem, it is only
logical that it also must constitute a part of solution. Accordingly, in an attempt of enhancing the study and practice of Catholic peacebuilding, the conference aimed to cover the theology, doctrine, methodology, and experiences of faith-based efforts to build peace and foster reconciliation.

In our inquiries, a special source of inspiration was the figure of Jan Karski, who brings the issue of morality and the issue of conscience back into International Relations. The conference drew upon his legacy by reminding the values which guided Karski – a nonpareil exemplar of bridging the divides between people of different races, faiths and political orientations. Jan Karski’s legacy and the values he represents were analysed in the contemporary context during a special memorial lecture which you will also find in this volume.

The main issues discussed were religion and peacebuilding, theology of peace, peace processes and mediation, violence prevention, early warning, conflict resolution, negotiated settlements, redress of grievances, human rights protection, restorative justice and the deployment of other instruments. The main goal of the conference was three-fold; we aimed to explore the following issues:

1. Religious Paradigms of Peacebuilding (examining how religious strategies for peacebuilding and reconciliation can be implemented in conflict);
2. Religious versus Traditional Practices of Peacebuilding (analysis of historical and contemporary case studies of disputes and conflicts from across the world to identify best practice guidelines);
3. Religious Actors as Peacemakers (with exploration of new approaches to peacebuilding and reconciliation);
4. Institutions, Organisations and Peace (assessing and identifying the cooperation in promoting peace and reconciliation);
5. Why Religion Matters? (considering the faith-based approach to peacebuilding and reconciliation);
6. Bottom Up or Top Down? The role of civil society and local communities (identifying and discussing the best approaches in peacebuilding and reconciliation);
7. The Role of Catholic Church – hopes and challenges;
8. Faith-based Reconciliation: Forgiveness – the missing link;
9. The figure of Jan Karski as an exemplar of bridging the divides.

We would like to thank all our speakers who took the time to attend and present their research at the conference, making it such an enjoyable, worthwhile and successful event. It is our sincere hope that you will enjoy reading the contributions
to this volume whose authors share their divergent views on reconciliation and peacebuilding from a Catholic perspective. Feel free to share the file with your colleagues! And we do hope to welcome you during our future international events.

Dr Monika Gabriela Bartoszewicz
Conference Convener
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Jan Karski Lecture
INTRODUCTION

Before I begin, I would like to extend the warmest thanks to Dr. Michal Łuczewski, The Warsaw John Paul the II Center, and the Museum of Polish History for the invitation to deliver the Jan Karski Lecture. I found the meeting I attended, here, a couple of years ago, so congenial and the intellectual exchanges so lively, that I was delighted to receive an invitation to return. (Plus, I always welcome an opportunity to have some extended conversations with Michal.)

In giving careful thought to what I would say at a conference on the topic of reconciliation, I especially tried to keep in mind three things: (1) my speaking order in the conference, (2) the anniversaries which the conference celebrates, and (3) my responsibility to give a Karski Lecture. In any paper of 30 minutes (or so) that is quite a juggling act. My sincere hope is that I will manage to avoid fumbling the pins.

Having the first lecture position—the “pole position” as we might say in the States—I don’t know whether you have a similar expression in Poland, though I suppose every lecture at a conference in Warsaw may have a “Pole” position—it seems to me that this entails that I (in some way) try to set up some background for the question at hand. My intention is ultimately to show how this background relates to the figure of Jan Karski. (Here, I must admit that my familiarity with Karski, before I received this invitation, was incidental. I came across his story years ago, when I was a part of the triumvirate (with Ann Astell and Sandy Goodhart) who formed the (now defunct) Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding at Purdue. My attraction to Karski then and, more recently, as I prepared for this lecture, was his moral excellence and compassion, but also I confess a fascination with the romance of his life led as a spy, a profession I actively sought membership in many years ago in another occupational incarnation.) However, I must file a quick disclaimer. I am neither a historian of WWII nor am I a specialist in Holocaust studies, so my appreciation of his work which ends this paper will be illustrative of the theological themes I develop, here. I do not attempt to do more than I am able.

My paper is a four part essay. First, I begin with a brief description of the semantic field of the New Testament words for reconciliation. Specifically, in the first part of this paper, I hope to sketch the New Testament understanding of reconciliation with its native political and religious ramifications (how Paul thinks it breaks down the walls between Jews and Gentiles in the cultural setting of his time).

Second, cognizant of one of the anniversaries, more directly connected to the
patronage of this Center and which this conference celebrates, I intend to take the meanings of reconciliation found in the New Testament and to use them to interpret John Paul II’s central extended trope in *Reconciliation and Penance* (1984)—the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Here, my purpose will be to show how this parable allows us to multiply consistent interpretations related to the New Testament notion of reconciliation while, at the same time, tying together most of the New Testament meanings of ‘reconciliation’ into a single tropic knot.

In the third part of this lecture, I hope to show—following some cues from Albrecht Ritschl—how, on the basis of the new Testament, but also in subsequent application—reconciliation might include those outside of the Christian faith as members of the same ethical and intellectual community (that is, according to “*iusstitia civilis*” teleologically oriented toward the same ultimate end), and thus how moral and intellectual reconciliation between parties on this basis might be understood.

Finally, in the fourth part—which is really the *dénouement* of this complicated piece—I hope to show that, in his attempt to save the Jews (and in his witness to the Nazi genocide), Karski concretely embodied roles of martyr and prophet as these are connected with the Biblical notion of reconciliation, especially as it is instantiated in a particular interpretation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

This paper is far too long to read, so I shall summarize the first two parts and read most of the last two parts.

**Reconciliation in the New Testament**

Although the themes of the New Testament have been largely over-mined, the theme of reconciliation is one which has received comparatively little treatment. In part, this is because in terms of frequency, the related words are used sparingly; in part, it is because these words, in their particular contexts, often complicate denominational discussions of atonement, justification, and salvation, whose consistency would otherwise be undermined by the changes that a focus on reconciliation would introduce into their systems. On the other hand, some scholars (such as the late Ralph Martin) see it as the encompassing theme of all notions related to salvation. For this reason, it is perhaps best to begin a discussion of the semantic field defined by the set of New Testament words which bear the various meanings of “reconciliation.”
The Semantic Field of New Testament Words for Reconciliation

The first of the words which circumscribes the semantic field of ‘reconciliation’ in the New Testament is the verb ‘allassō’: literally “to make otherwise” (allos [“other”] + lazomai [“to take, to seize, to grasp, to put”]) or to change something in some way, either wholly or partially; its other meaning is to exchange something for something else, to exchange some quality or thing for some other quality or thing (Kittel, *TDNT*, 1978 1:251-252). The first of these meanings is operative in the description of the false witnesses against Jesus, who claim his message is to change the teachings of Moses (Acts 6:14), or in Paul’s eschatological teaching of how “in the twinkling of an eye” we will be “raised incorruptible and changed” (1 Cor. 15:52),” or finally in the description of how Paul wishes he could change the tone of his voice (though not his doctrine) and be present with the Galatians (Gal 4:20).

The second of the meanings—change in the sense of exchange—occurs in Paul’s description of how the unrighteous have exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of corruptible” creatures (Rom. 1:23) and metamorphosed (metallassō) the truth of God into lie (Rom. 1:23).

The second word contributing to the semantics of reconciliation is apallassō, which has the general meaning of “to change something by carrying something away.” It may mean to liberate someone or something [transitive]; to retire (oneself) or withdraw (oneself) [reflexive intransitive], to break free, or to escape [intransitive] (Kittel, *TDNT*, 1978, 1:252-253). The author of *Hebrews* uses it to refer to the liberation by Christ of those under the thralldom of the Devil and death’s dominion (Heb. 2:15), and Luke uses it to describe the attempt by hypocrites to escape from judgment, while elsewhere he uses the same word to describe Paul’s healing on analogy with the ease of lifting of a tainted poultice and the withdrawing of disease and evil spirits (Acts 19:12).

Used only once by the author of Matthew’s gospel, diallassō, comes close to the common contemporary notion of reconciliation. There, the one who recognizes his brother “has something against him,” leaves his gift at the altar, to be reconciled to him before the sacrifice can be made (Mt. 5:24). Here, the brother who has offended seeks out the angered brother to put an end to the grounds for offense. Another possible side to this process is described in an extra-canonical source (an ancient Egyptian letter) as occurring between an enraged mother and provoking son (*BGU* 846:10). There the mother staunches her (righteous) anger and initiates the reconciliation (Kittel, *TDNT*, 1978 1:253). In the first case, the individual responsible
begins the reconciliation; in the second case, the offended party begins it; in both cases, the reconciliation relies on a response from the second actor in the relationship, a response that is expected to be positive, though it may not be.

Of the words for reconciliation used in the New Testament, ‘katallassō’ (kata + lazomai) bears the richest set of connotations. Used as a technical term in ancient finance, it has the meaning of exchanging one currency for another, general exchange, or replacement and was, presumably, used to describe the squaring of accounts (or columns) by the alteration of one entry so that it could be brought into correspondence with another. This meaning aligns with the theological proximity between reconciliation and justification in the New Testament, justification being understood as God’s annulling of the debt against humankind, thus erasing a mark against human acceptability and squaring the account (Spicq, TLNT, 1994 [1978], 2:263; Barclay, NTW, 1974, 164-165).

Used infrequently in the Septuagint, ‘katallassō’ (kata + lazomai) corresponds to the Aramaic ‘ratsah’, which in the Old Testament context carries with it the meaning of “to appease, to be kindly disposed, to reconcile, or to let one be reconciled” (Kittel, TDNT, 1978 1:254). In the New Testament it acquires a set of connotations which, though distinctive, are still continuous, in part, with those in the Septuagint, even as they are multiple. Reciprocity is important in some of these contexts as when ‘katallassō’ refers to the reconciliation of husband and wife after their separation (apallassesthai), a reconciliation whose performance is shared, but it is only Paul that uses the term as reconciliation between God and humankind (Kittel TDNT, 1978 1:254). Paul’s employment suggests that the action is on the part of God bringing the world or humankind in reconciliation to him, even if humans, as participants in this process, also may be described, reciprocally, as reconciling themselves to God. From humankind’s side, reconciliation is requested and enacted, God being the enabler while still expecting human response (Ibid., 1:255-256).

Though the ideas of reconciliation and justification have a certain salvific confluence, they ought to be kept separate. Reconciliation, like justification, is effected by the death of Jesus, which is its *sina qua non*, but reconciliation is more than the erasure of guilt, though it may be understood as requiring justification. For Paul, reconciliation is often connected to the theme of transformation, the reality that humans have been renewed or recreated in the totality of their minds, nature, and lives, especially as these are determined by their relation to God. This defines a state of existence in which the self has died, and in which Christ’s love is in control, so much so that it is for him alone that we live. This living in Christ is a state of
existence whose two measures are conscience and external action, with an important example of action being the very confession of the transformative power of reconciliation.

For Paul, reconciliation (katallassō) is not finished or complete with the reconciliation of humankind; the reconciliation of the kosmos is ongoing, and we apparently have a role to play in it. Of course, this does not imply a repetition of the crucifixion will be necessary to effect this completion. That is a once-only event.

In speaking of this reconciliation in the final restoration of all things (the apokatastasis pantōn), Paul creates a neologism, apokatallassō (= apo + kata + lazomai ["to take, to seize, to grasp, to put"] to describe how God, the plērōma, and Jesus Christ are all subjects responsible for cosmic reconciliation, for the kosmos’ transformation from its present state into perfection (Wigram, AGLNT, 1983 [1852], 43). The upshot of this ongoing process, whose terminus is only vaguely anticipated, is that death itself will be vanquished as Christ returns and delivers all powers and conquered enemies to the Father, and then Christ will be subject to the Father, even as the Father has subjected all things to Christ, so that God, finally “will be all in all” (1 Cor. 23-29). Here, a teleological basis for an understanding of the consummation of reconciliation makes its entry and prepares the way for my later remarks about the justitia civilis.

There are other places in the New Testament, where various words for reconciliation occur, but where rhetoric adds semantic content to these words and expands their implications. The Letter to the Ephesians illustrates this point well (and in a way that will be useful to some of my later points). There, Paul says that Jesus Christ functions as the reconciler between Jews and Christians because his blood, having brought the alienated Gentiles near, has made them one with the Jews, by destroying the dividing wall of the fence, reconciling them as one body, and killing hostility in it; now both the Gentiles and Jewish saints are members of single body and household, a household of fellow citizens which, through one spirit, has access to the same Father (Ephesians 2:13-19) (Martin, Reconciliation, 1989, 166-198).

Redolent with allusions to conflicting doctrines and historical antipathies, this passage compresses a teaching about the reconciliation of Jews and Christians in the words “destroying the dividing wall of the fence.” As the late Ralph P. Martin has argued, this phrase has multiple possible referents (Martin, Reconciliation, 1989, 176-188). The destruction of the vertical wall between God and humankind means that a similar, horizontal, division between people has been wrecked. That dividing wall, in this passage, may most plausibly be a figure referring to either: (a) the fence
enclosure around the Temple, which kept Gentiles out, or (b) the Jewish Law and its scribal interpretation, which keeps the pollution of Gentile congress, ideas, and practices out. “Make a fence for Torah,” says Mishnah Aboth 1.1.2. (Martin, Reconciliation, 1989, 180, 185-186). The general inference is that Christian reconciliation breaks down the walls that divide people (though this is not to say that the raizing reconciliation effects can be accomplished without some values, intentions, and theological ideas being shared between those on either side of the wall. From the inside of Judaism, Jesus destroys the division between Jews and Gentiles, just as he must continued to destroy inconsequential divisions between Christians and others.

From this brief summary, I think it is possible to disentangle five distinctive connotations of ‘reconciliation’ in the New Testament.

First, and most broadly, reconciliation means change, especially the substitution of one state of being or life for another.

Second, reconciliation, chiefly in extra-canonical literature, but also in connection to the New Testament understanding of justification, may refer to the balancing or squaring of accounts or ideas, this is to say that it involves bringing one idea into conformity with another, thus making them consistent.

Third, reconciliation may refer to the process of the return to fellowship between God and humankind, where God through Christ, is the initiator and cause but where humankind is expected to make an active response for the reconciliation to be complete (Spicq, TLNT, 1994 [1978], 2:265).

Fourth, reconciliation may refer to the process of return to fellowship between individual humans or opposed classes of humans, where one human (or one group) is the initiator and the other human (or group) is expected to make an active response. In the New Testament, the possibility for this kind of reconciliation always presupposes the reconciling act of God in Jesus Christ is accomplished, but from the side of humans it continues to be preached by the ambassadors of God, Christians and especially apostles, whose exhortation is “Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:19-20) (Spicq, TLNT, 1994 [1978], 266). The reconciliation between God and humankind is the precondition for the reconciliation between human and human or class and class.

Fifth, reconciliation may refer to the process by which creation will itself be restored (apokatastasis); the nature of this ultimate restoration being not exactly clear, it will nevertheless be a process in which Christians are co-creators but one which the cosmic Christ, and in him the fullness of the Godhead, a process which has begun but whose consummation will be the end of history as we know it.
This summary confirms the identity between the *New Testament* understanding of reconciliation and John Paul II’s summary of the Church’s mission and central task as being: “reconciling people: with God, with themselves, with neighbor, and with the whole of creation” (John Paul II, *RP*, 1984 [December 2nd], 1.1.8, 20). Having sketched the limits of the semantic field of the reconciliation-related words in the *New Testament*, I now turn to their application in three contexts.

**The Parable of the Prodigal Son: Polysemy and the Proliferation of Interpretations**

St. John Paul the Great uses the parable of the Prodigal Son as the fulcrum on which to turn his argument in *Reconciliation and Penance*. For this reason, and because within Christianity it has a long history of deployment as the great extended trope about forgiveness, I would like to treat it, at some length, as a prelude to the rest of my argument. However, I want first to telegraph a warning about its interpretation and, then, make some observations about its structure and content.

**The Strangeness of Parables**

Because of its familiarity as a parable in the history of the Christian tradition, we should not be blinded to this parable’s strangeness as it struck listeners in the New Testament, in the context of Jesus’ mission. Writing in the 30’s of the last Century, the Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis, T.W. Manson, pointed out that, what is called in the *koinē* of the *New Testament*, a parable (*parabolē*) more precisely corresponds to that ancient Judaic trope termed *māshāl* [Hebrew] (in Aramaic [*mathlā*]); this is a trope which is an umbrella term for forms of parable, proverb, and warning /“taunt song” all worked together (Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus*, 1961 [1937], 29). But even the notion of *māshāl* does not adequately capture what Jesus is up to in his New Testament discourses. Our confusion of the Greco-Roman understanding for what Jesus intended, when he spoke parabolically, lies at the basis of our unquestioning acceptance of a clear—and often single—meaning in Jesus’ parables. So what is the difference?

In classic sources, there are four criteria for determining whether something is a parable (*parabolē*): (1) it is a story which contains an implicit argument from analogy; (2) it depicts human relations; (3) it is about a case which, though not historical, might possibly correspond “with what actually occurs in real life”; and (4) it should be “more readily intelligible” than what it illustrates [my emphasis] (Manson, *The
Though there is continuity between Jesus’ speech and criteria #1 and #3 above, it is also quite clear that criteria #2 and #4 are violated. Criterion #2 is violated because Jesus’ parables are clearly about the relationship between God and humans; criterion #4 is violated because the Scriptures tell us that Jesus’ parables are intended to obscure for some and to disclose for others, even though the disclosure, when it occurs, is clearer in the parable than in its analogous reality. This intended obscurity is a support for the so-called “Messianic secret” hypothesis.

The contemporary reader may be inclined either to ignore the intended obscurity of the parables stipulated in the New Testament or to find the idea of obscurity, to be somewhat distasteful—or undemocratic even—the danger being of Jesus coming off like a Gnostic preceptor imparting an esoteric teaching to a select few. But Jesus’ purpose is not one with Gnostic insularity; rather, he casts his *logoi spermatikoi* (spermatic words) broadly, though they are only received and take root in fecund soil: Jesus uses the parables as selection devices, as instruments for the discovery of those who are already predisposed and to those who already, to some extent, pre-apprehend his message.

Manson’s summary of the continuities he finds between the classical Greco-Roman notion of *parabolē* and the classical Judaic of *māshāl*, on one hand, and the parabolic discourse of Jesus, on the other, merits quotation:

A parable is a literary creation in narrative form either to portray a type of character for warning or example or to embody a principle of God’s governance of the world … [including humankind]. It may partake of both natures. In logical terminology it might almost be called a concrete universal. The immediate object of the story is to be intelligible and interesting in itself; but its ultimate aim is either to stimulate the conscience, or to awaken religious insight in the hearers, or both together. In other words it has to make God [and his relations to humans] real …; so real that he is forthwith moved to genuine repentance and faith. It is emphatically not a mere sermon illustration for the purpose of stating some abstract proposition of ethics or theology in a simple pictorial form for the benefit of the unlearned… Further, it depends on its effectiveness not primarily on its excellence as an illustration, as we are prone to imagine, but on the responsiveness to those to whom it is addressed (Manson, *TJ*, 1955 [1935], 65-66).
The parable of the Prodigal Son as a literary form fits Manson’s description quite well, but when one stops to consider the possibilities it opens up, the ambiguity of its exact meaning becomes daunting.

The Analogical Prodigality of the Parable of the Prodigal Son

Granting that the features that Manson has identified in the parables of Jesus are definitive, the Parable of the Prodigal Son brings two (especially important to this paper) to the foreground. First, there is the strangeness of the solution as it must have stuck some of its listeners and, second, there is the feature which Manson calls the parable’s functioning as a concrete universal.\(^1\) It seems to me that the former is grounded in the latter. In other words, the logical structure of the parable sets up a confusing array of possibilities which make the moral of the parable difficult to apprehend, even though it opens an array of new interpretations.

If we consider just its actional structure alone, it is clear that the parable of the Prodigal Son is an instance of what Gregory Bateson and Tyler Volk have called the “meta-pattern” of the cycle.\(^2\) (I take ‘metapatterns’ as denoting properties of beings

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1 It seems to me that the Hegelian notion of a concrete universal is actually an instance of metonymy, an individual (a human) belonging to a class (humankind) and acting in a way that signifies a universal characteristic of that class. The question in the case of the Parable of the Prodigal Son is to identify the possible significations of the various actors and the possible significations of their actions with respect to one another. If one’s major concern is to preserve structure and consistency with doctrine, then a dizzying array of possibilities open up, especially when one moves to the level of the three spiritual sense of the Scripture. What reins this in, a bit, is that all possible interpretations, especially at the level of the allegorical, are not particularly edifying, in a religious or moral sense.

2 Gregory Bateson, the originator of the word, but not the concept, defines a metapattern as following: “It is a pattern of patterns. It is that metapattern which defines the vast generalization that, indeed, it is patterns which connect. … In truth, the right way to begin to think about the pattern which connects is to think of it as primarily (whatever that means) a dance of interacting parts and only secondarily pegged down by various sorts of physical limits and by those limits which organisms characteristically impose.” [And then Bateson goes on to speak in terms which are particularly relevant to this essay.] … A story is a little knot or complex of that species of connectedness which we call relevance. … I would assume that any A is relevant to any B, if both A and B are parts or components of the same “story.” Again we face connectedness at more than one level: First, connection between A and B by virtue of their being components in the same story. And then, connectedness between people in that all think in terms of stories. … Now I want to show that whatever the word story means in the story which I told you, the fact of thinking in terms of stories does not isolate human beings as something separate from the starfish and the sea anemones, the coconut palms and the primroses. Rather, if the world be connected, if I am at all fundamentally right in what I am saying, then thinking then thinking in terms of stones must be
across all levels of reality, properties which—on the basis of their similarity—are analogical according to Thomist philosophy.) What unites the variety covered by a metapattern is a common formal similarity, though the *onta* involved in the cyclic activity (and the number of stages partitioning each cycle) define them in their uniqueness. It is the abstractability of the *onta* out of structure of the cycles that is at the basis of their purely formal analogicity, though mere cyclic similarity entails a fairly empty comparison. What one wants, in Manson’s terms, are interpretations which are concrete universals, interpretations which unite both the metapattern and its various possible particularizations. Some of these cycles are connected intimately with the New Testament notions of reconciliation, and the Parable of the Prodigal Son is a knot which ties many of the strands of the New Testament meanings of reconciliation together. It was for this reason—no doubt—John Paul II employed it as his central trope.

To be completely consistent, any interpretation of the Parable of the Prodigal Son shared by all mind or minds, whether ours or those of redwood forests and sea anemones. Context and relevance must be characteristic not only of all so-called behavior (those stories which are projected out into “action”), but also of all those internal stories, the sequences of the building up of the sea anemone. Its embryology must be somehow made of the stuff of ‘stories. And behind that, again, the evolutionary process through millions of generations whereby the sea anemone, like you and like me, came to be—that process, too, must be of the stuff of stories. There must be relevance in every step of phylogeny and among the steps. … Was this what Plotinus meant by an “invisible and unchanging beauty which pervades all things?” What is a story that it may connect the As and Bs, its parts? And is it true that the general fact that parts are connected in this way is at the very root of what it is to be alive? I offer you the notion of context of pattern through time” (Bateson, Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity 1979, 11, 13-14). Bateson describes this connectedness of pattern as operating (1) reflexively in the parts of a single being, (2) between two different beings of different kinds, and (3) between comparisons of two beings at the level of different kinds (comparisons of comparisons) (Bateson, Mind and Nature 1979, 11). Many of the same things are assumed in Thomist doctrine of analogy. Tyler Volk describes a metapattern (less precisely though more prosaically) as: “a pattern so wide-flung that it appears throughout the spectrum of reality: in clouds, rivers and planets; in cells, organisms, and ecosystems; in art, architecture and politics. … I use the word metapattern in the Batesonian spirit—as a pattern of patterns—and seek examples at the very broadest scale” (Volk, Metapatterns: Across Space Time and Mind 1995, viii-ix). The last phrase of the preceding quotation suggests that the spiritual and metaphysical might be included as well, though Volk has not chosen to do that.

3 There are many kinds of cycles in the world, all united by analogous structures: in Biology, there are the Krebs (or Tri-Carboxilic Acid) cycle, photosynthesis cycle, and the ADP to ATP cycle; in Anatomical Physiology, there are Circadian cycle, Menstrual cycles, respiratory cycles; in Mathematics, there are the sinusoidal cycle, the permutations cycle, and cyclic groups; in Psychology, there are cycles of addiction, and in Neo-Platonic metaphysics there is the cycle of the emergence and recursion of being.
must specify all of the elements in this parable and do so: (1) consistently with the Scriptural context and/or (2) consistently according to the analogy of faith. That which steps out of one or other cannot be considered to be authentic to Christianity.

The action in the parable of the Prodigal Son begins with what it tells according to its face value, without reference to the fact that it is a parable. That structure is defined by a cycle (composed of two half cycles), an additional sub-cycle, four actors, two turning (fluxion) points, and five states. The actors are the father, the prodigal son, the elder son, and the citizen of the far country. The major cycle is the flight of the prodigal and his return to the father, or (to use Origen's Neoplatonic terms) an *apostrophē* (a turning away from) and *epistrophē* (a turning toward) divided by three turning (fluxion) points, one being the prodigal's decision to demand the conversion of his substance (*ousia*) and his father's reciprocal accession to his demand.4 The other turning point is the prodigal's conscionable return to self (his return from alienation) and, the third, by his being met by his father in the return. The turning away from the father is defined (in sequence) by the decision, the prodigious waste of the younger son's substance, and resulting destitution. The turning toward is defined by the awakening of regret and the awareness of presumption on the part of the son, the return of the prodigal in the company of the father, and his restoration to even greater honor than he originally possessed. The father's seeing the son returning—at a great distance—and then the meeting of the father and the son, defines an additional sub-cycle within the cycle. The final act is the elder son's jealousy and judgment of the younger son. Those represent the component of the parable at face value.

But because it is a parable, Jesus intends it to point to an interpretation which is not exhausted by this story's meaning at face value. In Thomas Aquinas' terms, the parabolic meaning *is* the literal meaning of the extended trope (*ST* 1a 1.10, *ad 3*). There are certainly a large number of interpretations of this parable possible.5 But what then seems to be Jesus' intention?

4 Origen, On First Principles, 1973, 1.8, 74

5 A possible, but now heretical, interpretation of this parable along Origenist lines would be to read it as a description of his notion of the apokatastasis panton, the reprobation and restoration of younger son signifying the fall of the souls into matter and their eventual return to the Father. Other fanciful interpretations might be the procession and return of the word in the Trinity or in Thomist realist psychological ontology (!). My own dissertation director, Edmund Perry, radicalizing Manson's argument that the parables always refer to Jesus, even suggested the—in my opinion indefensible—interpretation of this parable, which put Jesus in the place of the prodigal son. The point, here, is to suggest that the warranted interpretations are those which follow the analogy of faith.
Context allows us to establish that the principal meaning of this parable is not only a message of personal salvation (as we mostly have been taught)—namely that we are to identify ourselves with either the prodigal son or the elder and that Jesus and/or God is the father—but that the prodigal son represents the sinners, the elder son, the *self-righteous* Jews and Jesus and / or God as the Father. Another common interpretation in antiquity was that the younger son represents the Gentiles, the elder son represents the Jews as a people, and Jesus and/or God is the father. (Cyril of Alexandria [*Commentary on Luke*, Homily 107] and Peter Christologus [Sermon 5] both identify this as its signification.) It is the interpretation of the parable as referring to individuals—the reprobates and judgmental among us—which is actually the one that allegorizes according to a spiritual interpretation in line with the classical model of the four senses of the scripture.

The original context points to an interpretation that makes the elder son and the younger son classes of people. But the individualist allegorization is also perfectly consistent with the intended meaning—another application of it, really—and that is why it has found such widespread acceptance, especially after the context in which Jesus pronounces it ceases to have existential relevance for the reader. Clement of Alexandria is one of the first to thus construe it in his *Oration on the Passover*, and John Paul II continues this tradition of interpretation because it is most useful for the Church’s evangelical project in the present.

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7 Allegory = [From the Greek ‘allos + agoreuein’ “to speak other than in a public/common way”] Allegory is a rhetorical form in which a symbolic meaning is made to interpret the features of the literal meaning of a passage. Complementarily, an allegorical interpretation is an interpretation of a text which takes the concrete structural features of the literal meaning of that text and constructs a consistent symbolic interpretation which “opens a door” into a “deeper” meaning of that text. Allegories resemble metaphors but are more extensive and elaborately explicated. Likewise, an allegorical interpretation is more extensive than the explication of a metaphor. The construction of allegories typically follows rules such as the following:

**Rule 1:** Before one does an allegorical interpretation, one must establish the literal meaning of the text.

**Rule 2:** An allegorical interpretation should not contradict the literal meaning of the text.

**Rule 3:** An allegorical interpretation is the recognition of a pattern that provides an opening to a deeper consistent symbolic reading of a text.

**Rule 4:** An allegorical interpretation will allow the reader to see that other, more profound, ideas may be symbolized by the literal meaning of the text.

**Rule 5:** An allegorical interpretation will be of service when the apparent literal meaning of the texts cannot be sustained. It is then possible to switch to an extended symbolic interpretation.

**Rule 6:** Allegorical interpretations may draw on the structures of truths from other domains.

8 See the fragment of Clement preserved by Macarius Chrysocephalus: Oration on Luke 15: Parable of the Prodigal Son.
But the susceptibility of this parable to other spiritual senses allows us to multiply interpretations which are also consistent with it, so that it can speak to us in a plurality of historical and existential situations, apparently unanticipated in the context in which Jesus utters it. Of course, to multiply its senses, we must detach it from its specific Sitz im Leben but not from the broader context of Biblical faith and history.

For example, there is nothing in this parable to prohibit an intra-traditional interpretation of the younger and elder son and the cycle of falling away as referring to the historical cycles of reprobation and restoration (teshuvah) in the history of the Jewish nation in pre-New Testament times. By this interpretation, conscience plays the role of witness that prophets played in the grand cycles of Judaic history. The parable then becomes an object lesson, from within the prophetic tradition, about the forgiveness of God for his errant people which includes a warning that the “righteous remnant” ought not to sit in judgment of their weaker brethren. This interpretation is perfectly consistent with the values expressed by prophetic tradition in the Hebrew Scriptures. Considered according to their historical relevance, this modification is the first in a series of interpretations, a series in which the interpretation Jesus intended, and the application to the individual subject, are counted as second and third in terms of historical applicability, though which may be extended indefinitely.

By an inversion warranted by the reversal of fate and viewed as providential by Christian supersessionists, this parable may also be interpreted as a warning to those same Christians. By this interpretation, the Christians are the elder brother (in the faith), who looks on with jealousy and disdain as the Jews (now the younger brothers in the faith) are gathered into the kingdom, whether now or at the end of time. If this seems implausible, a little reflection on the history of the relations between Christians and Jews, on how jealously Christians have guarded their claim to salvation while condemning the Jews to damnation, will put doubt about his possible interpretation to rest.

Finally, this parable may have an even greater signification as a warning to Christians about exclusionary practice with respect to the other religious believers, outside of Judaism, who have been or ultimately will be gathered and reconciled in the Kingdom of God. It is this interpretation that clears the way for a reinterpretation of reconciliation that charitably extends it the way Ritschl’s revision of the justitia civilis did.

My point, to summarize, is that the Parable of the Prodigal Son is protean in its possible applications and that, as long as each one is consistent with the Biblical
context or the analogy of faith, the collection of these interpretations provide a rough circumscription as to how far reconciliation is to extend. Multiplying these interpretations widens our appreciation of exactly how merciful God is and how many different ways he intends reconciliation to occur. It also widens our appreciation of how many times analogous cycles of falling away from and return to God have been repeated individually in the lives of humans and in human groups since Judaic antiquity.

Clearly the parable, whatever the analogy one constructs, is a telescoping of many of the notions of reconciliation contained in the Gospels. There is return which can be interpreted from the objective and subjective side; there is conversion; and there is exchange: the exchange of a comfortable state for a dire one and a dire one for a more exalted one.

In summary then, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, as a meta-pattern and extended trope, can be teased out according to a series of illustrations of God’s loving reconciliation but also of God’s warnings against self-righteousness. This series is illustrative of what Ritschl will argue is God’s educative correction of humankind. This series also represents the growing awareness, in the history of the Church, of how far reconciliation extends. The possible interpretations make the parable an extended trope about reconciliation and warning against self-righteousness involving:

1. The righteous remnant and the reprobate Jews in Old Testament history and this as Teshuvah;
2. Self-righteous Jews and sinners (Jesus’ intended interpretation);
3. The self-righteous individual and the reprobate individual (John Paul II’s interpretation in his post-synod apostolic exhortation);

9 “The phrase analogy of faith is biblical: Romans 12:6 speaks of the charism of prophecy, along with such similar gifts as ministering, teaching, exhorting. Prophets exercised one of several “offices” within the primitive church (Acts 11:27 13:1); guided by the Spirit, they gained insight into the faith or recognized tasks to be undertaken. The Pauline injunction is given that this gift of prophecy must be exercised “according to the proportion (Gk. analogian) of faith.” No prophet is to be accepted who proclaims anything opposed to the “one faith” proper to the “one body in Christ.” Such preaching would be out of proportion to, or beyond, the objective truth entrusted to the Christian community. The analogy of faith, therefore, has always been associated with the one unchanging faith of the Church; it is closely related to the notion of Tradition and soon became a norm for the early Christian writers. They saw a “proportion” in the manner in which the New Testament complements the Old Testament and in which each particular truth contributes to the inner unity of the entire Christian revelation.” New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1:380B.
4. Jews and Christians (Cyril of Alexandria and Peter Christologous);
5. Self-righteous Christians and Jews (in the anti-triumphalist interpretation; and
6. Self-righteous Christians and the members of other religious traditions.

**Justitia Civilis and Reconciliation**

It is not by accident that in his magisterial work on justification and reconciliation (CDJR, 1870-1874), Albrecht Ritchl devotes a sizeable span to the discussion of the justitia civilis in its connection with the Christian doctrine of reconciliation. Ritschl sees this connection as emerging from an important and more fundamental question—to wit: “What inferences … does the God of love allow us to draw for the affirmation of a moral order?” (Ritschl 1966 [1870-1874], §38:303). Basing his argument on God’s paternal care, Ritchl comes to the conclusion that all evils which fall on the children of God—the members of the Kingdom of God—are educative, but he presses the point further by asking whether the Kingdom of God, as the telos “grounded in Divine love,” sheds any light on whether “the human race is educatively prepared for the Kingdom of God[?]” (Ritschl 1966 [1870-1874], §38:304.)

Some of the background to Ritschl’s claim is the way reconciliation is construed in the Old and New Testaments. God does not abandon his children, though he allows them to suffer the consequences of forgetfulness—to suffer—so that they may come to an understanding of their destitution.

This point is humorously made in the following midrash reflective of the Judiac understanding of the half cycle of the falling away from God.

**Amalek’s War**

“Is the Lord among us, or not? Then came Amalek” (Exod. 17:7-8). R. Levi said: What parable applies here to Israel?—the parable of a child who was perched on his father’s shoulders [in the marketplace]. Each time the child saw a desirable object, he said to his father, “Buy it for me,” and his father bought it for him the first time, the second time, and the third time. While they were walking, the child saw his father’s friend and asked him, “Have you seen my daddy?” The father spoke sharply to his son. “Silly boy, you are riding astride my shoulder, whatever you want I buy for you, and yet you ask this man, ‘Have you seen my daddy?’” What did the father do then? He dropped him from his shoulder, and a dog came by and bit the son. (Midrash Rabbah: Exodus, 3:26.2 [BL 5.16, 77a]).
The cycles of forgetfulness, falling away, destitution, recollection, and return are not only a pattern of reconciliation for the people of Israel; they represent a historical metapattern describing the shape internal correction may take for other cultures, as well. Wherever there is a falling away from the good, accompanied by resultant suffering, there opens the possibility for a slow and painful alignment of the values of that people with those of the Kingdom of God. Suffering (understood as deep education) is what works to align the values that prepare the way to this end.

That the idea of the Kingdom of God could even have been intelligibly communicated in antiquity, Ritschl argues, presupposes that “there existed … previous standards somehow analogous, which determined the worth of human life and prepared the way for the appearance” of this idea (Ritschl, JR 1966 [1870-1874], §38:305-306). Necessary to this preparation are the cycles of providential educative correction. For Ritschl, in their best realizations, the family, the state, and even empire, but especially laws have the value of “dispensation[s] established by the purposive will of God” (§38:311-313). For obvious reasons, the Protestant Ritschl does not refer to the extensive Patristic development of this idea and grants that it is, at best, an “incidental hypothesis” on the basis of the New Testament (Ritschl 1966 [1870-1874], §38:312).

When he looks for a point of attachment to engraft this idea onto the Protestant tradition, he finds it in the notion of the justitia civilis as it was developed embryonically by the classical Reformers Luther and Calvin and later with greater definition among the Protestant scholastics.10 The problem with the classical Protestant notion, however, is (1st) its ambiguity, meaning something quite specific for some theologians (“civil or societal justice”)11 and something quite general for others (“external things outside of grace”)12; (2nd) there is the tendency to view the distinction between the justitia civilis and the iustitia spiritualis only according

10 The origin of this distinction may be found in the Protestant radicalization of some of the Augustinian themes, particularly the notion of the exterior and interior human, which appeared in robust development in the De Trinitate, though it was an idea he returned to repeatedly in his career, prior to that work; it is also related to the adaptation of Augustine’s notion of the two cities, which is developed in the De Civitate Dei.

11 The narrower meaning is derivative from Protestant Confessions such as the Augsburg Confession [1530], Formula of Concord [1577], 2nd Helvetic Confession [1562], Gallic Confession [1571], Canons of Dordrecht [1618-1619], and the Westminster Confession [1646].

12 This general (more modern) meaning is employed by the Presbyterian, Charles Hodge, in his Systematic Theology, 1968 [1872], 2:2.8.15.5, 263
to the analogy of the opposition of law and grace and, along with it, the excessive objectification of the law as *legalism*, all of this to the exclusion of the exculpatory disposition that can often be found motivating obedience to law (Ritschl, *JR* 1966 [1870-1874]).

As classically developed within the Protestant tradition, the notion of *justitia civilis*, emphasizes a radical diremption between the *externality* of the acts of the non-Christian culture and the internality of the acts of Christian spirituality. The acts connected with *justitia civilis* are good in the sense that they are good instruments for achieving good effects in the public world, but little more. On the other hand, the *justitia spiritualis* defines a zone where there is a unity between acts and their intentionality. This might be summarized by saying the *justitia civilis* is productive of objective natural goods, while the *justitia spiritualis* is productive of both subjective and objective natural and supernatural goods, the mere faithfulness of the act being sufficient to sanctify it and the subject performing it and/or being a *witness* to what empowered its performance as well as being an act productive of objective goods all might share. But there is a problem with how neatly the lines are drawn in the classical Protestant notion. If Law and the State are viewed as providential, as some Reformers view them, then these same Reformers are in the contradictory position of valorizing the law in its objects and external effects, while seeing no value in those who obey them *with the right disposition* (§38:316).

Ritschl argues that for those passages in the *New Testament* that counsel obedience to the Law and State to be consistent, the Law and the State's ends (and the intentionality which characterizes obedience to them) must co-incide *with* and point *toward* fulfillment in the moral order of the Kingdom of God. Reconciliation operating in the cosmic order means that teleology and teleonomy are inseparable. Ritschl's conclusion is that just Law and the just State—and the dispositions that accompany the moral behavior of individuals in their support—make reconciliation possible between *the justitia civilis* and the *justitia spiritualis*.

Using clearer language than Ritschl, the Polish political philosopher, Zbigniew Stawrowski, has recently affirmed something very similar under the description of a “community of ethical communities”:

This idea reveals itself in full in the inner self-awareness of every moral ethical community—that is, such a community which is convinced of the brotherhood of all people, wants to call everyone to convert to that, which it itself considers as the best and most valuable, but at the same time, ack-
knowledges as a crucial element of its own system of values, that it can only do so with respect to the subjective freedom of individuals and their ethical background originating from their own ethical community. Such a feeling of belonging to a great worldwide family in which there is respect for both the ethos of each community, as well as the moral rights of the individual, originates in our culture from Christianity. This does not mean that it cannot be present in other universalistic religious traditions (such as Buddhism or Islam), or also exist in a nonreligious idea of a universal community of rational beings) (Stawrowski, CCCW, 2013, 121).

Without diminishing the significance of Ritschl’s accomplishment, I would describe it as stopping just short of the rediscovery of the Roman Catholic notion of baptism by implicit desire and the idea of natural elicited desire for the beatific vision. It stops just short because Ritschl’s excessive concentration on the moral dimensions of reconciliation (linked to politics) and his positive antipathy toward theological metaphysics cause him to obscure another dimension of the justitia civilis, especially when its meaning is interpreted more broadly as “external things outside of grace.” Ritschl’s excessively moralistic conception captures that aspect of the Kingdom of God which makes it a consummation of God’s love, but it ignores its alethiological dimension of the Kingdom as beatific vision. The Kingdom of God will not only be a kingdom of love and justice; it will also be a state of seeing God in truth.

If in addition to moral actions, philosophical and religious ideas may have an orientation that is consonant with the ultimate consummation, the ultimate consummation understood as the realization of truth in the beatific vision as well as the realization of goodness and love, there, then we must also include ideas as something which Christ came to reconcile, and to see them as anticipations of the ultimate consummation of things in which all truths will be reconciled in him. I think Ritschl’s insightful meditation on reconciliation requires expansion along these lines.

13 CCC 2.2.1.1.6.1260: “Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, of the Paschal mystery.”63 Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity.”
The thing about ideas is that if they are effectively conveyed, they tend to be contagious. They are not simply entertained in the consciousness of individuals, but, like some entelechial entity—a benevolent virus, for example—they act as transformative; they reorganize the thoughts and intentions of the individual in which they work. Nor are they devoid of objective moral consequences. Ultimately, they issue in actions.

Ideas can be reflective of transcendental orientations, but these will possess noumenal features that cannot be unequivocally established from the side of the phenomenal. There will always be a measure of uncertainty, when reasoning from their expression to the intentions of those holding them. But if their expression is one with internal disposition, and both their meaning and intention points toward truth, then they should be considered anticipations of the Kingdom, too. It would be wrong to stipulate that, before such ideas be reconciled to Christian belief and practice, such ideas must be unequivocally determined to serve the ultimate supernatural end—merely that they be oriented toward the natural good in such a way that the supernatural good stands indistinctly behind it. Such concepts are directed to the natural good as a target, a target that may eclipse the supernatural good while unintentionally serving it, nevertheless. Neither do the motives behind or the effects resulting from such ideas need to be pure in all respects, simply that, if they are mixed, that mixture must not be dominated by motives and effects which are fundamentally disordered.

It is in this way, I suppose, we should understand St. Paul’s charge that “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philip. 4:8)\textsuperscript{14} Further, we are called to deconstruct (kathaireō)”speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and … [take] every thought captive to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:5). The road to the eschaton is not only paved by moral actions and intentions; it is also paved by the protean assimilative capacity of Christian doctrine. Thus, if an idea is ordered to the true and the good end, even the naturally truthful or good end, and that is an end that prefigures in its own consummation the supernaturally good end, then the value of these ideas for the Christian should not be discounted, either as challenging, as useful, as preambles to faith, or as ideas to be used in the expansion of an already developed faith. Nor should they be dismissed as being

\textsuperscript{14} A passage particularly dear to me because it is inscribed on my old University’s seal.
devoid of embryonic faith or doubted as expressions indicative of the baptism by implicit desire. Rather, such ideas, with appropriate attunement, can be brought into harmony with the Christian project. This supplement adds philosophical and religious concepts (from outside of Christianity) as items also to find reconciliation in Ritschl’s Kingdom of God. Here, reconciliation also means the squaring of ideas with Christian religious truth. This supplement also bridges the Ritschlian *justitia civilis* and John Paul II’s understanding of the role of interreligious dialogue in interreligious reconciliation (John Paul II, *RP*, 1984 [December 2nd], 3.25.58-62).

*Jan Karski, Witness, and Reconciliation*

Since the 90’s of the last century, the biography of Jan Karski is widely known on both sides of the Atlantic.

Born in Lodz, in 1914, Jan Kozielewski was the youngest of eight children and grew up in that city’s heterogeneous mixture of Polish Catholics, Polish Jews, Germans and Russians. Comfortably middle class, his “fiercely Catholic” mother, early on, impressed him with the necessity of tolerance for others. Educated first by the Jesuits, he went on and studied law and diplomacy at the University of Lwów. A brilliant student, he quickly distinguished himself in his studies and, after university, was recruited into the diplomatic service, where he landed “plum” appointments to the staff of Polish diplomatic missions in Bucharest, Berlin, Geneva, London, and Paris. When war broke out in 1939, he returned home, as a reserve officer in the Polish army with the rank of lieutenant. As the Russian army invaded Poland from the east, he was captured and narrowly missed the Katyn Forest massacre, by disguising himself as an enlisted private.  

Fleeing back into Nazi-occupied Poland, Jan was recruited by his brother into the Polish underground and assumed the *nom de guerre*, Jan Karski, quickly becoming renowned for his daring, his fluency in languages, and his photographic memory for details. Captured on a mission to Slovakia in 1940, by the Nazis, he was brutally tortured, and fearing that he would divulge secrets of the resistance, he slashed his wrists in a suicide attempt, this leading to his hospitalization and a daring escape.

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15 This biographical summary is cobbled together from a number of sources, including Story of a Secret State, Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust, and the obituaries on the day of his death in 2000, the most extensive of which was the full page New York Times piece. Michael Kaufman, Jan Karski 1914-2000, NYT, July 14th, 2000; Karski Educational Foundation website [http://www.jankarski.net/en/about-jan-karski/jan-karski-life.html](http://www.jankarski.net/en/about-jan-karski/jan-karski-life.html); Julia Pascal, Jan Karski: Polish resistance fighter who risked his life to bring evidence of the holocaust to the west, The Guardian, July 14th, 2000.
aided by a socialist cell of the underground, the irony of which was not lost on Kar- 
ski, who remained an ardent anti-communist all of his life.16

After a period of recuperation in Warsaw, he embarked on a mission which was 
to redefine the direction of his life. Entering a cellar on the “Aryan side” of the 
Ghetto, disguised as a Jew, he entered the Warsaw Ghetto to witness the barbaric 
treatment the Jews by the Nazi’s, firsthand. In Claude Lanzmann’s documentary 
film about the Holocaust, Shoah, he remembered “seeing many naked dead bodies 
lying in the streets and described emaciated and starving people, listless infants and 
older children with expressionless eyes. He remembered watching from an apart-
ment while two pudgy teen-aged boys in the uniforms of the Hitler Youth hunted 
Jews for sport, cheering and laughing when one of their rifle shots struck its target 
and brought screams of agony.”17

There, he was given the charge by the Jewish lawyer, Feiner, his escort, to remem-
ber everything he saw and witness it to as many people in the West as would listen. 
Feiner and some of the other leaders of the Jewish community prepared a series 
of proposed Allied reprisals, which from a political point of view were impracti-
cal, but which they pressed upon Kar, nevertheless. On his second mission of 
witness, Karski went, disguised in Ukranian militiaman’s uniform to the town of 
Izbica Lubelska, a transit depot, where they were separated from their belongings, 
on the way to the extermination camp at Belzec. At Izbica, Karski heard cries of 
agony, smelled burning flesh, saw thousands of starving Jews beaten and stabbed, 
while separated from their possessions. Straightaway, they were herded like cattle 
into lime coated cars until there was standing room only and carried off to death 
by suffocation or gas.

His third witness about these atrocities was received coolly by his Polish supe-
riors, the British Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, and the American authorities, 
either on the pretense that operations to liberate those in the camps would deflect 
valuable resources from the prime military goal of winning the war or that a libera-
ted refugee population of the estimated size of the number of those survivors could 
not be absorbed into British or American society.18 While on his tour of America,

18 “Almost every individual was sympathetic to my reports concerning the Jews,” Mr. Karski said. “But 
when I reported to the leaders of governments they discarded their conscience, their personal feeling. 
They provided a rationale which seemed valid. What was the situation? The Jews were totally helpless. 
The war strategy was the military defeat of Germany and the defeat of Germany’s war potential for all
in 1943, he narrated the content of *Story of a Secret State*. Published in 1944, it became a Book of the Month Club selection.

After the war, Karski remained in the United States and earned a PhD in the School of Foreign Service, where he was a popular professor until his retirement in 1984. “In 1981, a year before the Israeli government recognized him as one of ‘the righteous among nations,’ Mr. Karski attended a conference organized by Elie Wiesel in Washington.”¹⁹ There he reflected retrospectively on the meaning of his wartime witness in the following words:

> The Lord assigned me a role to speak and write during the war when – as it seemed to me – it might help. It did not... Then I became a Jew. Like the family of my wife – all of them perished in the ghettos, in the concentration camps, in the gas chambers – so all murdered Jews became my family. But I am a Christian Jew. I am a practicing Catholic. Although I am not a heretic, still my faith tells me the second Original Sin has been committed by humanity: through commission, or omission, or self-imposed ignorance, or insensitivity, or self-interest, or hypocrisy, or heartless rationalization.²⁰

Returning to the parable of the Prodigal Son and the Ritschlian notion of the *justitia civilis*, I would like to close this essay by explaining how Karski functioned as witness and prophet to a world in flight from Judeo-Christian values. Now the words ‘witness’ and ‘prophet’ can mean many things, and when they are employed to describe the somber achievement of humans like Jan Karski, more often than not, they are applied with a looseness and banality that hardly honors the memory of their heroic achievement. Against either the abandonment of these terms or their cavalier use, I propose a return to Biblical meaning of ‘witness’ and ‘prophet.’ The result of this return will be to re-supply a precision and gravity lacking in their sometimes facile use.

However, it was only at the end of his life that Karski began to talk openly about the nature of his mission in religious terms. He seemed to see it as providential, in retrospect, but not at the time he was engaged in it. This complicates my final argument in this paper because I want to maintain that we can characterize his mission

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¹⁹ Ibid.
²⁰ Ibid.
and initial testimony as prophetic and reconciliatory, while recognizing its essentially non-religious content. Again, recourse to Ritschl can be of some help, here, if we recognize the possibility that prophecy may operate in the realm of the *justitia civilis* on an analogy with its supernatural content in the realm of the *justitia spiritualis*. The intentionality of each should be similar, though the content may not.

**Jan Karski as Witness**

The New Testament meaning of ‘witness’ or martyr (Gk. *martus*) is susceptible to semantic stratification – each meaning builds on a presupposed, relatively more elementary, meaning. Here, I suggest that it will be useful to distinguish what Husserl would call the *noetic* features from the *noematic* features of the phenomenon of witness (that is, it makes sense to distinguish the actional features of martyrdom, particularly the mental intentional features which shape witnessing as an act from the doxic or intelligible content which the act is about). This distinction is necessary because it makes little sense to say that Karski, qua witness, was testifying to the Christ event, as the early Christians did. Rather, the object of his witness was different, though it preserved many of the actional features of religious testifying.

First, at the core (noetic) meaning of ‘martus’, there is the sense that the witness must be present perceptually to see or hear or otherwise experience an event or an act that has repercussions, legal or otherwise. This notion of mere martyrdom—to act as a mere observer—does not presuppose that the witness necessarily has full knowledge, at the time, of the significance of what s/he experiences. This witnessing carries the lowest level of suasive force because one does not always understand what one has seen (Spicq, *TLNT*, 1994 [1978], 2:447).

Second, the second stratum of (noetic) meaning is added, when what is entailed is that the witness must proclaim what it is that he has witnessed, what s/he has direct knowledge of. This second added stratum means that the witness understands that what s/he has experienced has significance which can be affirmed or condemned according to a recognized standard. This adds force to the suasive effect of the witness (Spicq, *TLNT*, 1994 [1978], 2:447448-449).

Third, the witness may rest content with proclaiming the judgment of significance or s/he may add their personal conviction and energy to the prosecution of the cause which s/he witness to. The addition of the act of commitment on the part of the witness further contributes to the force of the testimony, because if the
transformation of the witness by what s/he has witnessed is such that s/he either is committed to the program implied in its significance or is committed to the defeat of the program, then those encountering the witness will more likely be persuaded of the cause's importance or truth (Spicq, *TLNT*, 1994 [1978], 2:449-451).

Fourth, the ultimate test of the witness is willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for the program implied in the significance of those things experienced firsthand. Sacrificial martyrdom (witnessing leading to death) for a cause, entails the confluence of all of the preceding features of witness. It possesses the ultimate suasive force of the three. Outside of the New Testament environment, the Rabbis have emphasized that one always has freedom even when one's choices have been limited to one—the choice of witnessing by dying for the truth (Spicq, *TLNT*, 1994 [1978], 2:451).

According to the noetic aspects of witness, as it is understood in the New Testament, Jan Karski was a martyr. He was eyewitness and auditor to the atrocities of the Nazis, he understood their terrible significance, and he was certainly willing to risk death, self-sacrificially—to convey that witness, but when it came to the prosecution of the cause against the Nazis, he did not augment his testimony with arguments or ideological rhetoric, rather the record of his heroism in the underground was what carried the additional suasive force of his message. His actions were the substitute for his rhetoric. In the ideologically charged atmosphere outside of the underground, in the courts of power in Great Britain and the United States, where his witness was delivered, this strategy set an effective tone.

Not all witnesses are prophets, in the Biblical meaning of either, nor are all prophets witnesses. The reception of a prophetic mission does not necessarily imply that the prophet sees or knows directly the message he communicates—but some do. The Biblical prophet, Hosea, is a case in point. God charged him with the mission to be participant in a marriage with unfaithful wife so that he may experience, first hand, what it is like for God to be wedded to the people of Israel. Hosea's witness issues from what he knows.

But there is an intersection set, where both missions are united in a special group of individuals. I think one can make a persuasive case that Karski was both a witness and prophetic figure, but again, in a limited sense.

**Jan Karski as Prophet**

The features associated with a prophet in the Hebrew Scriptures are well known:

1. They experience their call, irresistibly (Jer. 20:7,9; Am. 3:3-8).
2. The message is received as veridical (Jer. 26:12ff.).
3. The formulas of attribution to YHWH (Ko ‘amar YHWH!) are markers that the message is not their own but they are its mere conduits (Dt. 18:9-22).
4. The prophecy must be halakhically and doctrinally sound.
5. Prophecies are most commonly in the modal subjunctive form: if you continue to do A, then B will happen, but if you change your ways and do C, then D will happen. This form has a hortatory function which is related to the prophets’ critique of the misbehavior of Israel. It is also expressve of the Judaic emphasis on freedom to be reconciled with God. (Interestingly, its conditional expression mirrors the alternative circumstances governing case law in the Hebrew Scriptures.)
6. If the prophecy is a foretelling, then the events foretold will (necessarily) happen (Jer. 28:15-17).

Karski found himself a willing prophet caught in the round of Western civilization’s reprobation. He gave his testimony at that moment when it was possible to turn around those who would listen, with the hope that they would return to the values that once grounded them. In this, his action resembled that of an Old Testament prophet warning Israel near the nadir of a cycle of reprobation, though the content of his message was singularly non-religious.

Now certainly, it would be excessive to claim that Karski was a prophet in the Biblical sense, that he had a supernatural mission or that he delivered a supernatural message, though one might recognize that his message was providential and educative, in the Ritschlian sense. But I think there is a perfectly admissible way to describe his actions as, at least in a secular sense, prophetic. The expansion of the notion of justitia civilis along Ritschlian lines allows us to posit analogues to supernatural prophecy, which even without a supernatural warrant, work toward the same end, either because these prophetic individuals are awake to universal human values still lingering in culture or because the injustices and wrongs they see around them pique their consciences. So how was Karski a prophet?

First, he acted as a man whose mission was irresistible. He was obsessive in his work in the Polish underground and in his attempt to deliver the message of the Nazi genocide. No doubt, this irresistibility issued from Karski’s subjectivity, from his nature, value set, and conscience. His own memoir, as well as independent writings on his life, suggests a compulsivity on this score—perhaps constitutional—which is quite outstanding.

Second, the message Karski delivered was veridical because he was a witness according to the first meaning of witness in the New Testament (as described above).
He had seen the genocide with his own eyes. His keen memory recorded it. It was impossible to doubt or misunderstand its significance.

Third, like the prophets of the *Old Testament*, Karski sought to be the icon of the message. As someone who has an active interest in phenomenology, what fascinates me about the figure of Jan Karski is how he made himself *transparent* to the message he transmitted. He was well-suited to be a modern prophet in the way I have described because, by all accounts, he had a phenomenal memory but especially for details. Memory is a tricky thing; it can be distorted by one’s prejudices and political positions.

However, the record is clear that, going right up the chain of command, the principal players in the underground understood the dangers in tampering with what Karski saw, with introducing political interpretations into his recollected witness. What is notable about his reports about genocide is that he was commanded to deliver them as transparently as possible. So in the third sense of martyr—the sense of the partisan apologetic argumentation for a program—Karski remained silent, but his silence was merely the silence of words. What he had suffered (and who he was) spoke more dramatically about the truth of what he said than any argument he might contrive. The necessity of his transparency to the witness he carried—a witness which was his direct experience—derived from the facts that WWII was fought as a war where, in Winston Churchill’s words, “the truth [was] so precious it had to be protected by a bodyguard of lies.” This dissimulation was a practice which was the very métier of the Polish underground, but it was also the character of both Axis and Allied policies, as the Axis powers attempted to occlude knowledge of atrocities, while the Allies attempted to occlude their real motivation behind policies which, on the surface, were justified as humanitarian, though beneath the surface were really utilitarian and racist. In such a highly politicized environment, description of genocide (relatively) devoid of political spin was more effective as it could not be dismissed as ideology. And because of his special moral and intellectual gifts, this was what Karski was able to produce. As a bearer of what he saw he could not have been a more perfect vehicle of remembrance.

Fourth, the moral soundness of his message was reflected in the commonly shared values of the culture of Nazis committing the genocide and the culture of the Allies, who were so slow to be moved by it. The rectitude of his witness shown, like

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21 See chapter 16 of David Wyman’s *Abandonment of the Jews*, 1985, for a discussion of the immigration and war office policies which were anti-immigrant, at best, and anti-semitic, at worst.
a bright light, on their immorality and injustice. His ability to call humankind to re-
conciliation had appeal because of the remembrance of common values his witness
awakened. In this, he was one of the secular saints of the Ritschlian justitia civilis, a
hero of the Stawrowskian community of ethical communities.

Fifth, the hortatory purpose of his prophetic witness to the Allies, to do something
to stop the atrocities, is self-evident. The horrific alternative of inaction to prevent
the killing was implicit in his narrative about how systematically the extermination
was being conducted. Sadly, consciences of the Allies were awakened too slowly.

Jan Karski was caught up in the blackest round of history in the last century. He
lived as a modern day prophet and martyr in one of the most notorious cycles of
human barbarism and forgetfulness, and like an Old Testament prophet, he witnes-
sed what he saw in an attempt to awaken humankind to its folly and call it back to
its moral foundations. He was one of many who acted as the conscience of a gene-
ration, stopping at nothing, even in extremis, willing to be martyred for the cause of
bringing hidden evil out into the light of day.

How, finally, should we summarize the transformative impact of those witnesses
to reconciliation, like Karski?

Writing about the supra-political power of sacrifice, in the wake of WWII and the
Nazi genocide, Karl Jaspers observed that “Martyrs enhance the powers of those,
whose example they become” (Jaspers, BPW, 1986, 414). The supernatural promise
of Jaspers’ words and Karski’s moral witness are echoed in the Old Testament re-
ading for the Feast of All Souls, this past Sunday:

As gold in the furnace,
God has tried the … [righteous],
and received them as a burnt offering.
And in the time of their visitation,
they shall shine,
and run to and fro,
like sparks among the stubble. (Wisdom 3:6-7)

Thank you.
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On Reconciliation. Christian versus Secular Imagination of Peace in the Context of Politics
Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

The universality of reconciliation and its ultimate resource

All human stories deep down are stories of reconciliation. That is to say that the ultimate meaning of every story comes into view only when it is considered within the broadest and deepest context of all, that of the Father sending his Son to reconcile the world. The meaning of one's identity and of one's story is therefore co-constituted, on the one hand, by the act of divine forgiveness and, on the other hand, by the free response to the free gift of the divine love: one is truly oneself when one wholeheartedly accepts reconciliation by Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace\(^1\).

The first feature of reconciliation that I would like to call attention to is its universality. Since reconciliation is at the very core of the divine-human love relationship, revealed in salvation history (Heilsgeschichte), it concerns all humanity. This feature distinguishes reconciliation from other religious phenomena that concern, in their immediate way, only part of humanity (e.g. the Abrahamic covenant) or only certain people.

Although reconciliation is a personal act\(^2\) in the sense that it concerns the rela-

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1 “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace..” (Isaiah, 9:6)

2 I would like to recall here the distinction of medieval theology. One can say that reconciliation certainly does not fall into the category of 'actus hominis' for it is clearly a deliberate act that concerns the emotional and the intellectual faculty as well as memory and thus belongs to the category of 'actus humanus'. Reconciliation is, however, an even more peculiar act for it presupposes and expresses not only the difference between human and animal nature but also manifests that which is common to divine and human nature: personhood. Forgiving and asking for forgiveness not only presupposes that certain faculties of the soul are sufficiently developed but also that there is a conscious awareness of a certain relationship between two persons: without the other (divine or human) person I am not myself. See further: Raimun-
tionship between the divine and the human person and thereby the relationship among human, its consequences are extended to the whole creation. Since in and through Christ God is reconciled with the whole of creation, reconciliation introduces a whole range of different aspects to be understood. It concerns, then, not just human nature, but nature in general. This makes reconciliation highly relevant for any metaphysics and thus for all politics.

Reconciliation is capable of transforming the most fundamental relationship between Creator and creation because it is the superabundant fruit of the inner divine love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. What I would like to stress here is that reconciliation is only possible, and thus only decipherable, whether theologically, philosophically or politically, when fully acknowledged as an intra-Trinitarian reality. That makes reconciliation irreducible to any created source, whether philosophical, political or cultural, but issues rather from the love of the divine persons. Consequently, all approaches to peace and reconciliation – let them be theological, philosophical or political – leaving out of consideration this arch-data or reducing reconciliation to any ontologically lower origin, run the risk of profoundly misunderstanding reconciliation and missing its essence.

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3 "In intimate connection with Christ's mission, one can therefore sum up the church's mission, rich and complex as it is, as being her central task of reconciling people: with God, with themselves, with neighbor, with the whole of creation; and this in a permanent manner since, as I said on another occasion, 'the church is also by her nature always reconciling'," in: John Paul II., *Reconciliation and penance*, 1984, Nr. 35

4 A great example for a thorough phenomenological analysis of forgiveness is found in Mariano Crespo: *Das Verzeihen. Eine philosophische Untersuchung*, Universitätsverlag C. Winter, Heidelberg, 2002
**Imagining peace versus the fantasy of peace**

Any desire that one might have prompts us to come up with images that specify the content of what one wishes for. The question is of where these images stem from and how they are constituted in our consciousness. According to both a Biblical account and a thorough phenomenology of imagination there are two morally and spiritually different ways to exercise the act of imagination:\(^5\): one makes an image of the real givenness and penetrates into it towards its ultimate origin and essence. This imaginative act aspires to ascend to the ultimate source of the givenness thus I call it ‘imagination in God’ or ‘sub-creative imagination’ (using the term of J.R.R. Tolkien\(^6\)). This is opposed to the one that moves away from reality towards the construction of an alternative world. This is what I call ‘fantasy’ for it is based only on the ‘phantasmata’\(^7\), the exposed data that can be freely analyzed and modified by the creative mind.\(^8\)

I will limit myself to make three claims according to the three crucial moments of the process of specifying the ‘desire for peace’ in an image: its **fundament**, its **intentio- nal object** and its **subject**. I will briefly show the alternatives at hand when desiring peace with the two diametrically opposed attitudes towards reality that lead to the moral right of wrong usage of imagination.

1. **Fundament**: The first claim is that the desire is explicitly or implicitly based

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\(^6\) J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*, Harper Collins, 2006, see especially: ‘On Fairy Stories’, pp. 142-145. See further the great poem of Tolkien ‘Mythopoeia’ in which he denies the claim of C.S. Lewis according to which myths and the poetic work are nothing but “lies breathed through silver.”: [http://mercury.ccil.org/~cowan/mythopoeia.html](http://mercury.ccil.org/~cowan/mythopoeia.html), (1.10.1013). Let me quote here the most crucial part: ‘The heart of Man is not compound of lies,/ but draws some wisdom from the only Wise,/ and still recalls him. Although now long estranged,/ Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed./ Dis-graced he may be, yet is not de-throned,/ And keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:/ Man Sub-creator, the refracted Light/ Through whom is splitted from single White/ To many hues, and endlessly combined/ In living shapes that move from mind to mind./ Though all the crannies of the world filled/ With Elves and Goblins, though we dared build/ Gods and their houses out of dark and light,/ And sowed and the seed of dragons – ‘twas our right/(used or misused). The right has not decayed:/ We make still by the law in which we’re made.’ See further: Wayne G. Hammond-Christina Scull, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide*, Houghton Mifflin, 2006, pp. 620-622

\(^7\) St. Augustin, *De vera religione*, XXXIV, 64. In: *Volumen 32 de Sancti Aurelii Augustini De doctrina Christiana; De vera religione*, ed. Josef Martin, Klaus-D. Daur, Typographi Brepols, 1962

on a former experience. The desire for peace is authentic, if the fundament of
the desire is an experience of the act of divine reconciliation; it is inauthentic
if it lacks fundament, i.e. if peace is depicted as a future possibility of harmony
based solely on the participant's intentions.
2. **Its intentional object:** The desire for peace refers to a desire for the source of
peace (divine grace), that it should be re-opened, i.e. the harmony and close-
ness between the I and Thou should be restored. In contrast to this what an
inauthentic desire tries to construct through the act of fantasy is a 'peace' as
the condition of the possibility of the subject's self-realization. In other words:
either peace is understood in terms of a more intense community or in terms
of 'my peace', i.e. the undisturbed freedom for one's self-realization.
3. **Its subject:** The authentic desire for peace goes along with the strong and ide-
ally speaking complete engagement of the self. For peace characterizes the per-
son concerning all its relationships started with the most fundamental one to
the Holy Trinity. Participating in peace requires thus a transformation of all
these relations. The two indispensable steps to this transformation are: *repenta-
tance and conversion*. Their importance rests on restoring the consciousness
of oneself as gift. Without this peace is nothing but a mere *psychic state* rather
than a way of being.

What I call 'Imagination of peace' as opposed to 'peace-fantasies' integrates these
three elements in envisaging peace in the light of the image of Christ as Prince of
Peace. Let me explain this claim concerning the three basic points from above in
which way I claim that real imagination of peace is Christ-centered:
1. Any peace rightly imagined in whatever historical or cultural context is based
on the previous experience of peace, i.e. on humanity reconciled with God in
the redemptive act of Christ.
2. 'Imagining peace' is imagining God being truly close to us. What gives a con-
crete content of the imagination is the already given experience of the bond
between the divine and the human. Imagination of peace is therefore mainly
concerned with concrete ways in which we participated and are called to par-
ticipate in the divine life. Thus imagination of peace is a never-ending penetra-
tion into the revealed mystery of how the supernatural pervades the natural.
Thanks to this real presence of the divine it is possible to establish a personal
and vivid relationship with God acknowledging one's own culpability, on the
one hand, and the *at-one-ment* Jesus achieves for us. This acknowledgment pa-
ves the way for repentance and conversion both of which are indispensable elements of any imagination of peace.

3. The consciousness of oneself as gift is both the fundament and the fruit of imagination of peace. It is a fundament for only a self that knows itself as a gift of God, which is capable of imagining peace as reconciliation with the divine. Any other ‘self’, i.e. somebody who is not conscious of oneself, as implied in the ‘analogy of being’ revealed by the redeeming act of Jesus, would not be worthy of divine forgiveness for there is an infinite gap between the human and the divine reality. The gift of self is, at the same time, the fruit of imagination in the sense that penetrating into the reconciliation with God through Christ allows for envisioning the new man that is and acts in complete accordance with the divine will. How can something be a prerequisite and a fruit of something at the same time? This is not a circulus vitiosus but rather a hermeneutical circle of understanding oneself as gift: there is a unity between the one that is fully gift and one that has to be there already in order to receive this gift.

I stress that peace is a divine gift. Imagination is precisely the conscious act that explores how and from what source peace is given to us as well as how one can receive this gift and respond to it.9

There is another way to look at peace, however, that is introduced and governed by the contrary act of the same imaginative faculty: fantasizing about peace. I think that the most important point here is that the secular idea of peace fundamentally denies the link between peace and community. Secular fantasies of peace contradict all three elements of the imagination of peace as analyzed above, that is, fundament, intentional object and engagement of the subject. Even though the ways of contradiction are manifold, there are some common points I would like to highlight!

1. Any fantasy of peace that characterizes the secular imagination of modern liberal democracy understands peace, if not directly as a mere psychological phenomenon10, then at best in political terms: the status-quo of political cont-

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9 This point is also highlighted by John Paul II in Reconciliation and penance Nr. 192.: “As a result of an awareness of this <being reconciled with the whole creation>, at the end of the celebration there arises in the penitent a sense of gratitude to God for the gift of divine mercy received, and the church invites the penitent to have this sense of gratitude.”

10 A good example for this is the well known book of Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence, Bantam Books, New York, 1995
flicts allowing for collaboration and thus prosperity. Peace rather than being a former and foundational experience of community and therefore constitutive for one’s identity is depicted as that particular future state of affairs, the political actors are working on to achieve.¹¹

While an imaginative approach to envisaging peace is guided by the experienced reality of peace within a concrete community (polis), fantasizing on peace apparently needs no such guidelines; it is enough that it serves the powerful that are capable of engineering the desire. It is their well-being that determines the content of the actual political fantasy.

Certainly any imagination of peace is eschatological for it expounds the content of the already given experience that appears as a promise to be fulfilled; the meaning for peace as a reality right now gives itself so to speak as a memory of the future that we hope for. Peace-fantasies are eschatological in a completely different sense; instead of awaiting for what ‘ad-venit’, i.e. is coming to us as a gift of eschatological time, it is future-oriented by believing in a continuous progress towards a putative ‘perpetual peace’ – to use an expression of Kant. Peace as an eschatological content in this latter sense lacks any reality for it is only a regulative image, an ideal directing actual political action. Paradoxically its lack of concrete content is regarded by the secular mentality as its greatest virtue for it gives enough space to create a peaceful ‘brave new world’. This is the moment when creative ideology is at its best.¹²

2. Any idea of peace that is not rooted in the acknowledgment of peace as gift runs the risk of promoting a peace-concept merely based on ideas developed by the human mind. That is why peace-fantasies are unable to shed light on the real source of peace. Peace fantasies are even false concerning the point of their own origin, for any secular idea of peace is not just influenced by the religious experience of peace but it is its derivate and reductive version. This shows

¹¹ To understand peace in these terms is already present in the “ground-breaking” work Erasmus of Rotterdam, The Complaint of Peace, edited in 1521. (http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/87, 12.10.2014.) This tendency is even more prevalent in the essay of Kant from 1795, Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay, translated with Introduction and Notes by M. Campbell Smith, with a Preface by L. Latta (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1917). <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/357>

¹² The lack of content is highly praised in the form of neutrality by post-modern ideologists like Agamben: his work of The Coming Community is also an outstanding example of the pseudo eschatological orientation of peace-fantasies. See: Giorgio Agamben, The Coming Community, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001
that although peace cannot be fully invented, it can certainly be constructed in
an ideological way whereas its ultimate source remains not only obscured but
also completely disguised by ascribing its existence to the human mind. Part
of this disguising is the phenomenon strongly criticized by John Paul II in his
Encyclical ‘Reconciliatio-et-paenitentia’: calling into question the sinful nature
of man.\textsuperscript{13} Denying sin renders the need for religious reconciliation entailing
repentance and conversion superfluous. According to this false argumentation
the remaining desire of peace can perfectly be fulfilled by reforming society
through extending individual freedom in a way that one’s own interests could
be accomplished without clashing with another’s self-realization.

3. Concerning the question of how peace is to be established, peace-fantasies do
not attribute to the individual person any real initiative or transforming role.
They rather recommend going with the flow: the mechanical participation in
the undisturbed processes of a well functioning society. These fantasies thus
do not entail any reference to repentance and conversion in a religious sense
while certainly noticing when somebody goes against the strong and detailed
orders of secular society. When despite all forbearances one happens to fall out
of order, is not something one can repent or overcome by conversion: ‘social
crime’ is considered as irremediable and the person has to be neutralized. Gi-
ven the fact that the most important merit of this order lies in its well-functio-
ning, social misbehavior (that is all that remained after eliminating sin as such)
easily appears on an impersonal level as a malfunction of the system that sho-
uld be corrected by some appropriate mechanisms. Peace-fantasies thus often
deflate in constant attempts to reform the system. The apparent innocence of
the human person does not therefore prevent from blaming, discrediting and
even eliminating certain groups or individuals that are considered aliens by
the system. Moreover, this step is inevitable for if one denies the human capa-
city of repentance and conversion, there is only one way to remedy systemic
malfunctions threatening the fine-tuned peace: they have to be eliminated and
erased. It is the hypocrisy of liberal society that when crying out and preaching
tolerance concerning its own deficiency, it ends up in a terror against all who
supposedly are not tolerant enough.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} See 1 Jn 1,8-9.; John Paul II, Reconciliation and penance, ch. 13. ‘The Tragedy of Man’
\textsuperscript{14} See the interesting analysis of Wendy Brown, in: Wendy Brown, Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age
of Identity and Empire, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006; the same point is even acknowledged
by Slavoj Zizek, in: Slavoj Zizek: ”Tolerance as an Ideological Category”, in: Critical Inquiry, Autumn
The prize for the mere secular peace that relates the two essential elements of reconciliation cannot be but an open or camouflaged terror against all ‘parts’ of the progressive system that do not fit in. In short, if one wants to establish heaven on earth, it seems one has to establish purgatory and hell as well: the prize for having nice and perfectly organized living districts surrounded with fences is the reality of the shanties constructed outside the city limits.\textsuperscript{15}

Politics of reconciliation

There is certainly no time to elaborate in detail what a politics of reconciliation might consist of. Along the lines of the reflection developed above, I limit myself to mentioning only two essential characteristics: politics of reconciliation is imaginative and is based on the right understanding of ‘polis’.

\textit{Imaginative}

Politics in general involves the usage of the imaginative faculty, for “politics is the art of the possible” – though not so much “of the attainable and next best” (Bismarck), but rather of the possible that is already \textit{real} beyond politics and that wants to be incarnated and consumed in all relationships. True and authentic imagination here means envisioning the complete transformation of political relations guided by the concrete experience of participation in the divine life that engenders peace. \textit{Imaginative politics} is more \textit{realistic} (more based on the real divine deed) than just aiming at cease-fire and mitigation or even elimination of conflicts; it understands reality on the horizon of a firm hope for true forgiveness promoted through repentance and conversion. Political actions are directed to foster the culture of asking for forgiveness and forgiving rather than the blind-alley struggle for rights, etc.

\textit{Based on the true polis}

There is no politics without a clear understanding of polis. \textit{A politics of reconciliation} can hardly be promoted without being based on the polis that is truly reconciled. True reconciliation however means being reconciled with the highest principle of being, with the Creator of all. The polis that not only has this experience but also

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lives from it, by being nurtured by its Redeemer, is the community gathered at the Eucharistic Altar. This community, the Body of Christ, is called to be reconciled in order to promote the culture of love and peace.

A politics of reconciliation and thus a politics of real peace cannot have any other starting point than the polis Eucharistically gathered, for without this transcendent dimension of peace, it would be realized on a mere horizontal level and would therefore be deflated in fragile political agreements. Reconciliation in God is the experience capable, not only of pacifying, but also of transforming the members of the community gathered into one Body. This peace endowed to them has a future, for it stems from the common future of all humanity; it is sustainable because it is based on a real event the meaning of which is inexhaustible; finally it is stable because, like the calmness of the martyr, it cannot be destroyed by any aggression. Any political act that stems from this experience and is faithful to it, or at least does not deny its truth, falls under the category of politics of reconciliation.

16 See further: William T. Cavanaugh, Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism, New York, T & T Clark, 2002; an interesting case study can be made on the Holy Mass celebrated by John Paul II in Warsaw on the 2nd of Jun 1979.
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Transformation of conflict as the key element of religious and non-religious peacebuilding
One of the most interesting issues referring to religious peacebuilding seems to be the question of mutual relations between religious and non-religious initiatives, both in the theoretical and practical dimension. On one hand it is being stressed that both the philosophy and methods used in the processes of conflict resolution and peacebuilding by religious actors produce a specific, different quality compared to the non-religious activities. Since the conceptual framework of non-religious peacemaking is based on realist categories of power, interest and survival of the state rooted in secular political philosophy, such notions as forgiveness, compassion or reconciliation are perceived as inadequate in the traditional political discourse1.

On the other hand the analysis of particular elements constituting religiously motivated initiatives show that so called faith-based diplomacy has a lot in common with the new alternative approach to conflict resolution that is to serve as the support for traditional diplomacy with regard to the most difficult, protracted conflicts. This approach has been developing since the 1960s and has been known as track II diplomacy or citizen diplomacy.

Although many different models have been proposed the key point in the area of track II diplomacy is focusing on the needs and emotions of both individuals and whole societies and on the necessity of profound “transformation of hearts and minds” of the conflicted groups. The experts in the area of track II diplomacy refer to those elements which in fact combine a religious and non-religious approach to peacebuilding. Healing of wounds, empathy, compassion, dialogue and forgiveness are the notions constituting this approach with two crucial terms being the transformation of conflict and reconciliation.

Due to the renaissance of identity and the role of the identity factor in contemporary conflicts, it is necessary to refer to a more holistic way of thinking in the area of peacebuilding compared to the traditional one based on Realpolitik. Opinions appear that the realist paradigm is unrealistic nowadays since it ignores spiritual and emotional needs and aspirations as well as interpersonal relations which are fundamental in the processes of peacemaking and peacebuilding2. Experts in the area are convinced that such an amended perspective focusing more on the subjective factors is necessary both to be able to understand the nature of conflicts and to work out alternative, more effective methods and instruments of peacebuilding.

The purpose of the paper is to present a general overview of the concept of “conflict transformation” as an approach where religious and non-religious peacemaking not only meet but even overlap, creating new possibilities of common activities to solve contemporary conflicts including those most difficult ones. Two concepts will be dealt with as the examples of transformative approach to peace: John Paul Lederach’s conflict transformation and Herbert Kelman’s socio-psychological approach to peace.

**Evolution of world order**

The nature of conflicts that have dominated the world scene since the end of the Cold War increasingly refer to ethnic, or more general identity factors, raising the problem of redefining the approach to solving them. One of the big issues discussed in the area of conflict resolution is the question of how to perceive these conflicts from the perspective that would take into consideration the shift from a “power determined” approach to “identity determined” approach. The dimensions that had to be thought over were the shortcoming associated with the manner in which official negotiations to end identity civil wars were designed and conducted. Over the years, the discussion which has been taking place in conflict resolution literature between those who perceive the cause of conflicts to be structural and those who perceive it to be psychosocial/psychocultural has reached a new stage. It has been recognized that the two approaches are complementary both for gaining a deeper understanding of conflicts and for designing more comprehensive approaches to deal with them. This way the need for systematic change and relationship change were taken into consideration as the necessary components of the more effective, reformed approach to peace in the post-cold-war order.

The change in world order was the moment of resurgence of the religious factor in international relations, as well as “discovery” of this factor as a crucial element of peacemaking. Cynthia Sampson’s and Douglas Johnston’s book *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* published exactly 20 years ago was an essential input into advancing the discussion of the necessity of referring to a modified approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding with the religious factor as one of

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the components. Examples of effective peacebuilding based on religious doctrines and performed by religious actors were developed into a convincing theoretical framework. The essence of this approach has been calling for the reorientation of world politics towards a less state-centric focus on the power-politics model to accommodate nongovernmental interactions at the subnational and individual levels.

The postulate of the transformed way of conducting international relations, described by Douglas Johnston as the search for the “new paradigm”, is in fact the central point of both religious and non-religious alternative approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The concepts of faith-based diplomacy and track II diplomacy serving as the support for traditional diplomacy in rebuilding of the relations between conflicted groups have gradually become the topics of wider discourse.

For the last two decades awareness that religion does matter as the functional dimension of contemporary international relations has grown significantly. It has also been recognized that overlapping of religious and non-religious peacemaking is not only a possibility but in some cases a necessity with regard to the conflicts where identity factor plays a role. As a result another visible change has been increasing cooperation between religious and non-religious institutions.

Religion as a “change”

While religion can be perceived as the means to preserve and justify existing social order, it can also be perceived as the encouragement to change the world. The struggle for social and political equality is seen by many theologians as a spiritual struggle attempting to realize God’s kingdom on earth. The role of religion in recreating the world can be found in all major religions. Under the leadership of prominent spiritual leaders such as Martin Luther King, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Mohandas Gandhi and Mother Teresa, religious and faith-based organizations have contributed significantly in attempts to achieve social change that mainly aims at correcting injustice. Numerous initiatives undertaken by these actors in the

7 Ibidem, pp. 762-763.
area of humanitarian aid and development constitute a significant part of efforts performed in these areas on a global scale.

Another important dimension of faith-inspired activism to bring about social change is connected with the struggle for political equality. Such well known examples as the Black Civil Rights movement in the US, the “Solidarity” movement in Poland or the South African Antiapartheid movement can be recalled. What is also crucial in the case of rebuilding societies after periods of internal divisions and violence is that religiously motivated communities and organizations are often engaged in the processes of restoring of social bonds within these societies. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and the effort made by Desmond Tutu is just one case on the long list of activities undertaken in all corners of the globe.

When talking about “the change”, both systematic and the change in relationships, crucial religious doctrines come into mind. There is no doubt “the change” shall be perceived as the main goal but also an instrument of religious peacemaking. The general purpose that religious peacemaking undertakes can be summarized and understood as the call for the change of the individuals as well as the change in the relations towards opponents.

Helene Cristini points out one of the most significant weaknesses of realist paradigm is that it ignores the fact that international, national or social conflicts arise ultimately from inside. It is in fact ego that is the root of difficulty and our modern problems are not necessarily caused by extraneous factors.

The remedy can be sought in all major religious traditions. “For all their diversities, there are certain properties that most of the major religions hold in common: the premise that self-centeredness is the source of most unhappiness, that help is needed to overcome this condition, and there is a “divine” ground from which humankind has sprung and in relation to which one’s true worth is to be sought. Finally and perhaps most important they also contain some version of Golden Rule. These represent significant commonalities on which to build in promoting interfaith dialogue and the nonviolent resolution of differences.”

The point of departure for the transformation of conflictual relations into peaceful relations is summarized in the Golden Rule. Dethroning oneself from the

8  http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/religion-and-development-database/list/publications (access: 30 October 2014)
center of the world and putting another there can be perceived as one of the crucial elements of proposed change in both interpersonal and international relations. As formulated in the Charter for Compassion, serving as the base for a growing global movement, new opinions towards one another is the condition for reaching this change. Compassion as “the best idea that humanity has ever had” is to become the organizing concept to restore not only compassionate thinking but, more importantly, compassionate action to the center of religious, moral and political life12. “(...) The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves”13. According to Karen Armstrong when we get rid of ego we are ready to see the divine. She recalls Saint Augustine pointing out that Scripture teaches nothing but compassion14. All religions are in the first place the calls for a committed way of doing things and religious doctrines are actually summaries showing how to engage in following the Golden Rule of compassion.

While getting rid of ego is perceived in religious peacemaking as the condition of individual change leading to interpersonal and intergroup change the crucial instrument of transforming conflictual relations within the religiously inspired peacemaking is reconciliation. Born of spiritual conviction, reconciliation can play a critical role by inspiring conflicted parties to move beyond the normal human reaction of responding in kind, of returning violence for violence15.

Reconciliation can be found in all major religious traditions. As it is pointed out by Brian Cox and Daniel Philpott it is “(...) neither a recent trend nor a Western importation. The ancient religions express it most deeply defining it as the restoration of relationship”16. In spite of some differences, reconciliation is found in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism and is a moral vision consisting of many interwoven ideas. The first of these ideas is healing of historical wounds which if left unhealed make a conflict to continue through generations. The second idea is apology and forgiveness which are essential for restoration of wounded communities and strongly emphasized in all religious traditions. Finally

12 http://charterforcompassion.org/the-charter (access: 31 October 2014)
13 Ibidem.
the third obligatory element of reconciliation is social justice which is interrelated with forgiveness. “Forgiveness does not mean giving up the pursuit of justice. But without forgiveness, “justice” becomes angry, hostile revenge – an escalation, not a solution”17.

**Transformative approach to peace**

A transformative approach to peace has been developing since the 1990s though it is rooted in the concepts born in the 1960s. Although it embraces many different models it is based on a few basic assumptions that differentiate this approach from others, especially from the conflict resolution approach.

The crucial point of reference is the fundamental change in attitudes and behaviors of individuals as well as between two or more disputing parties. What is essential about this change is that it goes beyond the immediate situation, altering the way in which the parties see themselves, the world and what most important, how the parties see and treat each other over the long term18. The time-frame is one of the defining elements in this approach and contrasts with problem-solving conflict resolution, which is criticized by transformative approach specialists as only resolving a specific short-term problem usually ignoring or avoiding long term relation issues19. Transformation of conflict is limited only to people-to-people relations. It is understood in a wide sense as both systematic change and relationships change. This way conflict transformation can be perceived as a different and more comprehensive process than conflict resolution.

While there are some similarities to be found between conflict resolution and conflict transformation, the differences are of fundamental importance. The above mentioned time-frame is one of them. Resolution shows a tendency to concentrate upon the immediate and shorter term, while the transformative approach advocates the long-term processes leading to deep changes. Transformation includes the “aftermath” dimension meaning traumas, fears, hurts and hatreds, which are of less importance for the conflict resolution approach. Another difference deals with the levels at which dealing with the

17 B. Cox, D. Philpott, op. cit., pp. 35.
19 Ibidem.
conflict takes place. While in conflict resolution these are mostly elites or at least opinion makers and influential groups, in the transformative approach the processes take place at all levels including the grassroot level. Finally, in resolutionary approaches the changes in relationships are not accorded a central place since it is assumed that these will naturally follow once the conflict is successfully resolved. In the transformative approaches the change of relations is the central point.

One of the most renowned experts in the transformative approach to peace is John Paul Lederach, whose spiritual formation comes from the Anabaptist Mennonite tradition. Referring to the term “conflict transformation”, Lederach states that neither conflict resolution nor conflict management reflect most proper approach. Conflict resolution implies that conflict is bad and for that reason it should be ended. It also suggests that conflict is a short-term phenomenon that can be resolved permanently through mediation or other intervention process. As to conflict management this notion suggests that people involved in the conflict can be directed or controlled as physical objects. Besides, it does not direct attention to dealing with the real source of the problem, focusing rather on reduction or control of volatility.

Conflict transformation is the most accurate term because it has to do with constructive change efforts that include and go beyond the resolution of specific problems. In John Paul Lederach’s theory conflict transformation is based on two realities: conflict is normal in human relationships and conflict is a motor of change. “Transformation provides a clear and important vision because it brings into focus a horizon towards which we journey – the building of healthy relations and communities, locally and globally. This goal requires real change in our current ways of relating. Conflict transformation views peace as continuously evolving and developing the quality of relationships rather than a static “end-state”. It is the “holist approach” including personal, relational, structural and cultural changes.

John Paul Lederach calls for “paradigmatic shift” from traditional diplomacy and

22 H. Burgess, G. Burgess, T. Glaser, M. Yevsyukova, op. cit..
24 Ibidem, pp. 5.
26 Ibidem, pp. 27.
the Realpolitik approach towards the new frame involving new actors and new solutions: “(…) I have a rather modest thesis. I believe that the nature and characteristics of contemporary conflict suggest the need for a set of concepts and approaches that go beyond traditional statists diplomacy. Building peace in today’s conflicts calls for a long-term commitment to establishing an infrastructure across the levels of a society, and infrastructure that empowers the resources for reconciliation from within that society and maximizes the contribution from outside. In short, constructing the house of peace relies on a foundation of multiple actors and activities aimed at achieving and sustaining reconciliation”27.

In Lederach’s approach reconciliation is perceived as “an important meeting point between realism and innovation”28. In his conceptualization of reconciliation, the first and self-evident but at the same time often neglected notion is that relationship is the basis of both the conflict and its long-term solution. Reconciliation is thus not pursued by seeking innovative ways to disengage or minimize the conflicting groups’ affiliations. It is rather built on mechanisms that engage the sides of a conflict with each other as “humans-in-relationship”29.

Another key representative of the transformative approach to peace is Herbert Kelman. The method proposed by Herbert Kelman refers to socio-psychological concepts. He developed his model of interactive problem-solving based on the theory worked out by John Burton in 1960s. John Burton, an Australian diplomat who turned academic, accompanied by his colleagues at University College London challenged traditional, realist approaches to international relations and sought to undermine them introducing a pluralistic, systems-oriented perspective. One of the essential implications of this “world society paradigm”, as Ronald J. Fisher calls it, is that violent conflict, rather than being inevitable and amenable only to power strategies, is a problem that is open to diagnosis and resolution referring to integrative solutions30.

Herbert Kelman has been greatly influenced by Burton’s “basic human needs” theory. In this approach John Burton referred to Abraham Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs”. According to Maslow’s theory, human motivation is based upon a hierarchy

28 Ibidem, pp. 25.
of needs moving from basic physical requirements up to psychological requirements such as recognition, attainment and fulfillment that are claimed to be biologically innate.

In the expanded concept worked out by Burton, more stress was put onto psychological needs that are considered to be even more fundamental than food or shelter. What also differs in this approach from Maslow’s theory is that needs do not have hierarchical order. Perceived as an emergent collection of human development essentials “(…) needs are sought simultaneously in an intense and relentless manner. Denial by society of recognition and identity would lead, at all societal levels, to alternative behaviors designed to satisfy such needs, be it ethnic wars or other types of violence”31. That is why deep-rooted conflicts can be resolved only by the understanding and satisfying of suppressed human needs of each group which can be achieved during analytical problem solving workshops. Traditional power bargaining does not take place during these workshops32.

According to Herbert Kelman, traditional realist approaches are usually insufficient in dealing with intractable conflicts as they do not take into consideration the subjective factors. Analysis of the way in which group attitudes and perspectives condition intergroup conflict can provide conceptual tools to overcome subjective factors such as psychological barriers that set constraints on rationality in resolving conflicts33. These conflicts are not merely intergovernmental or interstate phenomena. They should be perceived as intersocietal processes instead. For that reason psychological, cultural and social-structural dimensions must be included in the multidimensional analysis of the conflict. Based on that analysis the transformation of relations between parties is possible. What is crucial though, is that solutions should come from the interaction of parties supported by third party efforts34. The goal is to facilitate communication between the two opposing groups so that they would come up with their own ways of solving the conflict, rather than offering them to accept ready-made solutions35.

32 Ibidem.
33 Ibidem, pp. 217.
34 Ibidem, pp. 221.
Concluding remarks

The “change of hearts and minds” on all sides of the conflict and at all levels of conflict can be perceived as an essence of religious peacemaking. Although rooted in a different “narrative” compared to nonreligious peacemaking it appears to have a lot in common with the transformative approach to peace which represents a new, more human-oriented approach developed in the area of conflict resolution.

One of the elements focused on strongly in religious and non-religious peacemaking is transformation of conflict. Transformation is seen as a shift in perceptions and attitudes that makes peace possible. This wide concept strongly connected with forgiving and reconciliation is becoming the basic operational term in the area of track II diplomacy being at the same time indispensable condition of faith-based peacebuilding initiatives. This way such notions as healing, forgiveness and reconciliation “become reality” not only in religious but also in non-religious peacemaking and peacebuilding where more “touchy-feely” approach has been accepted.

Transformation of conflict and reconciliation as a crucial element of this transformation, rather than just signing a peace agreement is the area where religious and non-religious peacemaking overlap. Transformation of relations based on reconciliation is perceived as the condition of lasting peace and refers both to international conflicts and to domestic conflicts where the relations between the individuals and the groups need to be rebuilt and changed.

Religious and non-religious peacemaking appear to have more in common also due to the fact that religion can be inspirational to politics when religion is operationally defined in conjunction with such areas, crucial for the alternative approach to peace, as psychotherapy, philosophy or metaphysics. It is now being strongly emphasized that though structural aspects of peacebuilding based on social, economic and political reconstruction are important it is necessary to refer to spiritual and emotional dimension in effective peacebuilding as well. Psychological or even anthropological aspects of conflict are examined resulting in paying special attention to basic human emotions and needs perceived in a holistic way. What count are not just the basic security needs or material needs but also cultural needs, including the spiritual ones. This way nowadays building peace is perceived much more often as bridging cultural divides rather than any other divides.

Cooperation of religious and non-religious actors in various aspects of peacemaking and peacebuilding has been the fact. In the first words of the Special Report on

Religion and Peacebuilding Susan Haywards notices: “The field of religious peacebuilding has begun to move closer to the mainstream of conflict resolution practice and theory (...). American and European nongovernmental organizations, agencies in the US government, academia and international organizations – sectors that once held religious issues at a distance and understood religion mainly as a driver of violence – increasingly engage religious communities and institutions as partners in creating peace. Meanwhile, religious organizations that have been involved in creating peace for decades, if not longer, increasingly have institutionalized and professionalized their work, suggesting ways that secular and religious organizations could coordinate their efforts more closely.”

In general it can be stated the evolution and often redefinition of many crucial notions in the area of international relations that have developed over the last decades prove the religious and cultural factor to be more needed and more appreciated when talking about security, development and peace. This can be perceived as the result of expansion of more human-oriented and less power-oriented approaches appreciating more non-material and non-tangible dimensions. This evolution can be also analyzed as an interesting and important element of the changing world order where the role of individuals who “mean more” and “can do more” has been observed.

Such a change could be perceived as anthropologization but also as humanization of international relations which could be perceived as the progress of “relational paradigm” proposed by Harold Saunders. According to this view, politics when rightly understood is not about power but “about relationships”. In the area of peacemaking this would transpose into embracing each individual and each group involved in the conflict in the bottom-up approach increasing significantly the chances for making peace instead of only signing a peace agreement.

Still the call for the new paradigm in international relations seems to be valid. The main point of the proposed view is that since diplomacy typically tries to resolve conflicts according to the notion of interest there is a need to go beyond the normal mechanisms to uncover and deal with the sources of conflict by rebuilding relations and making concessionary adjustment wherever possible.

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Reconciliation
as Reintegration
In early 1982 a military conflict between Argentina and Great Britain started over the Falkland Islands (called Islas Malvinas in Argentina). In the papal itinerary there was a pilgrimage to Great Britain scheduled earlier but John Paul II had a dilemma whether to go to a country involved in a war. On the other hand, the Catholics from Britain begged the pope to come despite the war because they really needed his support, as the relations between Roman Catholics and Anglicans had historically been difficult and the planned pilgrimage raised a lot of hopes of improvement in this respect. The solution which the pope found was the following: first inviting bishops from both countries in conflict to a common mass at the Vatican, and soon after the pilgrimage to Britain adding an extra pilgrimage to Argentina. This way he did not put himself in the position of favoring one country over another. Was this an attempt at reconciliation of the warring parties or an attempt at avoidance of one’s own involvement? It seems to me that neutrality would be represented by withdrawing from earlier plans of going to Great Britain, while going to both countries and especially inviting bishops from both countries for common prayers gave evidence of engagement on the side of effort to bring reconciliation to both parties.

Papal personal involvement in conciliatory efforts was also noted as early as in 1978, soon after his election. A political conflict between Chile and Argentina was likely to turn into an open war over a territory of three islands claimed by both countries. The pope made a phone call to one of the leaders of the conflicting states with an offer of mediation, which was accepted by both states and soon they demobilized their armed forces. Many examples of other initiatives, speeches, and gestures throughout the pontificate of the Polish pope contributed to making multifaceted reconciliation a key motive of activity of John Paul II. Let us just mention the ecumenical movements within Christianity, meetings and prayers with representatives of various faiths like the one in Assisi, Jewish-Christian dialog and the historical visit to the Rome synagogue and the prayer in Jerusalem Wailing Wall, vivid debates between Catholic and non-Catholic academics in Castelgandolfo, 104 pilgrimages outside Italy, bringing many ignored cultures to the eyes of the whole world and linking universal Christian message to particular local settings, World

1 More on this topic can be found in my article entitled „Love Speech as Action. John Paul II's Teaching and Practice of Conciliation”, in: Reconciliation in Bloodlands. Assessing Actions and Outcomes in Contemporary Central-Eastern Europe, Jacek Kurczewski (ed.), (Polish Studies in Culture, Nations and Politics, ed. by Joanna Kurczewska and Yasuko Shibata, vol. 3), Peter Lang Edition, Frankfurt am Main 2014, pp. 63-84. Fragments of this article are used in the present work.
Youth Days as representing intergenerational integration of youngsters and the ever aging pope, as well as the difficult and arduous process of historical analyses of the past faults of the sons and daughters of the Church, followed by papal requests of forgiveness culminating in the ceremony of the “Mass of Pardons” on the “Day of Forgiveness” of the Jubilee Year (March 12, 2000).

When does one try to undertake such efforts as mentioned above? When one believes in the possibility of success of such initiatives. In other words, when one believes in the reality of consensus, agreement, and unity as more fundamental than the experience of divisions and conflicts. The challenge of reconciliation seems to exactly focus on this central issue of unity or harmonious integration as non-utopian, non-oppressive, or not imposed. Reconciliation is thus connected with restoring the lost unity, reintegration (as the Latin term reconciliātiō, reconciliāre means causing agreement or even bringing back the state of unity). However, unity need not assume homogeneity, while difference does not need to evoke conflict. Unity may be based on both similarity and differences which are complementary, just as it is the case with sexual differences within the common humanity of men and women. The complementarity of the sexes present in John Paul II’s theology of the body and new feminism may provide a model of complementarity as the road to reconciliation without exclusion or power struggle between contending parties within various social entities besides families. For this inspiration to be valid, though, one needs to abandon the modern strict division between the public and private spheres; a division which restricted the place of love to the private sphere and defined it in terms of emotions only, rather than in terms of attitudes based on the will of reasonable subjects. Social reconciliation in the deep sense of the word thus seems to require the reintegration of the public and the private, as with the mutual opening up of the theological and social/political/historical/economic dimensions. The terms of such openings and mutual inspirations may, therefore, require vivid discussions and new settlements. However, there seems to be no other possibility than cooperation between these spheres in times of grave need for various types of reconciliation in the face of conflicts destroying the existence of whole communities in many places of the world in recent times. That is why theological reflection on reconciliation can be inspiring for social analysis because theology and religion seem to contribute the perspective (almost lost in modernity) of hope in the possibility of overcoming past divisions and reintegration of sometimes seemingly opposed parts of a hidden unity. Reconciliation, at least in the Catholic perspective represented in John Paul II’s teaching on the subject, means the restoration of the
formerly integrated whole, though in a somewhat different shape. The shape may even be improved by the process of forgiveness and effort of going outside of oneself, overcoming one's limitations, in order to reach the other. In the papal exhortation *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, reconciliation is presented as four-dimensional: as bringing back the unity between God and the person, establishing the internal unity within the person, the intersubjective unity of the people, and the reconciliation between persons and the created world. Various dimensions are, however, united by the necessary basic condition of success, namely the need for personal internal change: „there can be no union among people without an internal change in each individual. Personal conversion is the necessary path to harmony between individuals.“ (*Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 4). After all, the whole document was devoted to the sacrament of reconciliation and penance which is based on the notion of personal responsibility and personal act of recognition of fault as well as penance.

However, this is personalism, not individualism deprived of the sense of common telos and dominant in modernity according to Alasdair MacIntyre.² In John Paul II’s document all sin is at the same time personal and social. “To speak of social sin means in the first place to recognize that, by virtue of human solidarity which is as mysterious and intangible as it is real and concrete, each individual's sin in some way affects others. […] According to this first meaning of the term, every sin can undoubtedly be considered as social sin.” (*Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 16) Because of existential links between people both bad and good acts of persons can influence others. The essential and pre-existent communitarian integration of people can form the basis for the hope and possibility of reintegration in reconciliation processes. Though the ultimate theological basis for optimism is constituted upon God’s initiative of self-giving love able to redeem humanity and exceedingly compensate for human infidelity, the God-given nature in itself already contains the seeds of integration and unity, which need God’s grace and human effort to bring forth the fruits of reconciliation. The pope identifies a certain longing within human nature which seems to be given in experience: there is „in the very midst of division an unmistakable desire among people of good will and true Christians to mend the divisions, to heal the wounds and to re-establish at all levels an essential unity. This desire arouses in many people a real longing for reconciliation even in cases where there is no actual use of this word.” (*Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, 3). Re-

Reconciliation as Reintegration

Conciliation is here seen as a goal naturally wanted and desired by humans of good will. The road to reconciliation and peace is not restricted as available to religious believers only, but open to all people of good will, provided they assume the existence of and faithfulness to the universal moral law of values and goods which can be recognized by human reason. A similar argument was developed by the pope in his document pronouncing three female saints as co-patronesses of Europe: “Europeans are called to leave behind once and for all the rivalries of history which often turned the Continent into a theatre of devastating wars. At the same time they must work to create conditions for greater unity and cooperation between peoples. Before them lies the daunting challenge of building a culture and an ethic of unity, for in the absence of these any politics of unity is doomed sooner or later to failure. In order to build the new Europe on solid foundations it is certainly not enough to appeal to economic interests alone; for these, while sometimes bringing people together, are at other times a cause of division. Rather there is a need to act on the basis of authentic values, which are founded on the universal moral law written on the heart of every person.” (Spes aedificandi, 10). Consequently, this touches the question of truth as faithfulness to the recognized moral law. In Reconciliatio et paenitentia, 9, the pope claims that no unity or conciliation is possible without being based on truth. However, truth as understood by Christians is the way of embracing the difficult facts of divisions and faults within the framework of a deeper truth about the saving Love able to change people’s hearts and recover broken unity. The source of this Love is recognized by Christians as God, but may be operant also without such consciousness. Within this perspective it can be grasped how truth can make people free by empowering them against their own destructive tendencies brought by the original break from God as the source of love and unity. This standpoint also links truth with its being available to the reason of human beings. What is more, truth here is not opposed to freedom because the former is discovered reasonably and not constructed and imposed socially. Truth is real and pre-existent, therefore reconciliation is possible by the free decision to acknowledge truth again instead of embracing the falsehood of divisions which question the multidimensional community of being. The early modern transformation of the concept of free will undertaken by William of Ockham⁴, of will not restricted by reason or nature,

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explains much of the contemporary problems with seeing links between freedom, reason, and nature, or with assuming the possibility of a community of humans underlying their differences. Ockham's view resulted in the loss of the possibility of conducting rational debates not only about the transcendent reality but also about any good arrangement of the social, political, or economic sphere in the mundane world. In such a perspective what remains is not the debate and persuasion on the basis of reasonable arguments but praying in common or next to one another. Even such prayers seem sensible only when motivated by the hope of assumed, though hidden unity of truth as love being the source of interrelated human existence. Hence the logic of one of the most remembered events of John Paul II's pontificate, namely the interreligious meeting of the world's spiritual leaders which took place in Assisi on October 27, 1986. The success of Assisi initiative lied in its practical dimension. It became a symbol of reconciliation via close meeting and well-intentioned common prayers. The meeting was not intended to start a dialogue of possibilities of being together for one purpose but it actually was already a get-together prayer. Additionally, there was no attempt to create artificial efforts from above the particular traditions but all participants were encouraged to pray for peace from within their present religions. However, the rationale for this was not relativistic but connected with the assumption that seeds of truth are present in different traditions and good will can bring all people closer to Truth, and therefore closer to unity. The pope's sensitivity to differences coming from particular identity-building settings was itself embedded in the assumption of universal links between people and supported by a faith in God as the father of all. Hence, the standpoint of the pope on combining universality with the full spectrum of local particularities and differences. This is nowadays exceptional and as such contributes great arguments in favor of raising hopes for various types of social reconciliation.

All in all, the papal vision of reconciliation is the vision of its possibility because of its already existent reality. The social, i.e. relational nature of human beings makes all efforts at reconciliation sensible as efforts of revealing the deep communitarian nature of beings. Such is also the realistic philosophy of the New Feminism inspired by the pope's theology of woman and sexual relations. New Feminism, which is based on the thesis of high relational consciousness of women, naturally endowed with birth-giving capacity, provides an interesting kind of stimulation for bridging the modern divides created between men and women, nature and culture/society, sex and gender, body and consciousness, and many others (which I do not have the space to discuss here but which I analyze in other writings). The New Feminist
attempts at reconciliation may give the much needed answer to the modern loss of community. After all, the modern flight from community into individualism has not by an accident been accompanied by “the flight from woman”. The latter concept is borrowed from an old, though still vital book by Karl Stern, who presented the modern exclusion of womanhood and called for restoring the balance between femininity and masculinity. This would take the form of reintegrating organic and organizational features of social life (the feminine seen as the “sense of organism” and the masculine as the “sense of organization”). Though published several decades ago (first published in 1965), the book shows still unresolved issues, finding their echoes in the standpoint taken by New Feminists. The female consciousness of relationality of human beings may provide a much-needed solution to the one-sided dominance of the modern tendency of overstressing the conflictual and divisive side of reality. For Stern the relational was strongly linked with the personal: individual dignity comes to be recognized through relations, especially that relation which is available to the experience of mothers: “the sense of the infinite importance of the single individual is rooted in the experience of pregnancy, birth, and nursing”. Without such a sense of reality the world becomes threatened by inhuman qualities. “When Goethe felt the poetic reality of things threatened by the world of Newton, when he recoiled from Holbach’s machinery, he remained committed to a kind of medieval universe. A reaction like this is commonly regarded as regressive, infantile. People speak in such cases of a «movement back to the mother.» And they are right, only not in the derogatory sense in which they mean it.” To me it seems that Stern’s vision and the papal New Feminist standpoint is the perspective of slowing down the civilization and paradoxically moving it forward. This looks like the reconciliation of opposites, but maybe only quasi-opposites?

6 Ibid., p. 286.
7 Ibid., pp. 295-296.
Religion and Church(es) in Northern Ireland Peace Process

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The topic of this paper is the position and role of the main Northern Ireland churches and denominations in the peace process, especially in the process of reconciliation. I analyse chosen examples of churches’ activities toward reconciliation and building good relations between Catholics and Protestants, and also between other churches and religious groups living in Northern Ireland.

Introduction – wider institutional background

Northern Ireland is changing. The peace process and devolution of power have opened up new opportunities to the province. The Good Friday Agreement (10.04.1998) was based on a referendum which over 70 percent of the population voted in favour of. Devolution of power meant not only self-governing for the province (“devolution of policing and justice to Belfast”) but also devolution of power within the province, which gave real access to power and local government for previously discriminated-against Catholics. The consequences of the GFA and following agreements (St. Andrews Agreement 2006, Hillsborough Agreement 2010) are seen in the structure of local government and the offices of First Minister and Deputy First Minister. General elections in 2007 and 2011 have given political power to the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein; Peter Robinson is First Minister and Martin McGuinness is Deputy First Minister. This situation makes loyalist and republican parties cooperate for common good, within government and the civil service.


Citations from an official government programme shows, that reconciliation is crucial for building a new, indeed shared and better future for all citizens. However, this must be a difficult position for both political sides; for decades republicans and loyalists were fighting with each other, including killing or planting bombs. This fight created many victims and did a lot of harm to both communities, Prote-
Religion and Church(es) in Northern Ireland Peace Process

stant and Catholic alike. Reconciliation may seem a crucial factor for building good cross-community relations, but it is not an easy way.

“The Trouble” with Religion

The Northern Ireland conflict is often called – especially in mass media – a “religious conflict”.

Religion may seem the most important factor in the Northern Ireland conflict – it defines basic lines of divisions among the Northern Irish population. Religious identification has played a significant part in this conflict, people have been identified in the first place as Protestant or Catholic. All other dimensions of social and cultural differences and divisions have been built on religious identification.

However, the Ulster conflict is not a religious, but rather an ethnic one. In the process of ethnic identification, religion is a crucial factor – Protestant means British or Scottish, Catholic means Irish. And this fact determines where one lives, what one is doing for living, what one’s perspectives are and one’s circle of friends and family. Still, religious issues are not the reason or the object in the Northern Irish conflict. This is rather an example of social and cultural aspects of religion, what believers “do” with religious missions/messages, how religious identification is used for political purposes. As Alan Finlayson put it: “in Northern Ireland, religion defines the historically-based ethnic core around which the community identity has crystallised” (Finlayson 1997; 84). Nationalism, whether Irish or British, seems itself to be religious. Conor Cruise O’Brien has talked of Irish nationalism’s deification of Ireland, Godland. Ian Paisley constantly identified the struggle of Ulster Protestantism as the struggle of chosen people against evil. Hunger strikes in 1981 were explicitly compared to Christ crucified (Morrow 1995).

It is worth remembering that Northern Irish society is still a society in which a large majority of the population professes religious belief, and regular church attendance remains relatively high (Morgan, Smyth, Robinson, Fraser 1996), although attendance in all denominations is declining. Still, churches like the Roman Catholic Church and main Protestant churches: Methodist, Presbyterian and Anglican, play a significant role in the lives of individuals and in community life – for instance the Catholic Church has founded and maintained schools, open to Catholic pupils. Protestant children go to public state schools.

It is also worth remembering that the position of churches and actions of clergy have been ambivalent during the ethnic conflict. As I mentioned earlier, the Ro-
man Catholic Church supported Ulster Catholics and maintained Catholic schools. Priests have taken part in Republican parades, supported the republican movement, have held funerals of IRA soldiers, and supported IRA members, hiding terrorists or weapons from police.

Protestant clergy supported their believers and the biggest Protestant churches: Anglicans, Presbyterian and Methodist worshipped together, united against Catholics. Rev. Ian Paisley established the anti-Catholic and anti-Irish Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster.

Without a doubt, churches were “ascribed” to particular communities, and were seen as not just protectors but also agents of these communities. Churches provided refuge and comfort. The Catholic Church has long been the largest and most publicly prominent institution within the nationalist community. Sharing the suffering of the Catholic people of Ireland during penal laws period, the history of the Church was always closely bound to that of the people (Morrow 1995). Likewise, Protestant denominations supported true and loyal subjects of the crown and were seen as an essence of British identity and the British (that in fact meant Protestant) way of life. This way of thinking, this attitude, has lasted for a long time, through decades.

On the other hand, the Catholic clergy have in general opposed political violence in Ulster and among many nationalists, especially republicans, they have been regarded as strong opponents of IRA and republican paramilitaries. Also many Protestant denominations have condemned acts of violence committed by loyalist paramilitaries.

There were also examples of mutual actions, examples of “bridging the divides” between Catholic and Protestant communities, like common gatherings in churches, where clergy and members of Catholic and Protestant churches were meeting and worshipping together. It seems that when conflict was going on and on and violence was escalating, Roman Catholic Church and Protestant Churches were supporting their parishioners, offering comfort and peace.

The peace process has offered churches a chance for change – a chance to be significant players in process of reconciliation, in the process of healing wounds of their parishioners. A chance to build peace in the province. And most Christian churches and denominations have supported the Good Friday Agreement/Belfast Agreement (2008) and peace process. Reconciliation refers to Christian religion and implies forgiveness and mutual understanding, thus Northern Irish churches have played an important role in the peace process.
Institutional cooperation between churches

Institutional cooperation between churches is one aspect of reconciliation. One of the largest organizations that brings together Christian churches is Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (www.ctbi.org.uk). CTBI is open to very different churches and denominations, including beliefs of migrants: its members are Anglican churches, African-instituted churches, Congregational churches, Methodist churches, Orthodox churches, Anglo-Caribbean churches and many others, including the Roman Catholic Church.

The CTBI project replaced the British Council of Churches, in order to create a broader space for the broader spread of churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church. In 1987, at a meeting in Swanwick, the churches adopted a declaration on Christian unity. The declaration emphasizes the common ground or common basis of all religious tradition, and CTBI declares partnership between clergy, to facilitate effective collaborative work and above all create ecumenical spaces. “Churches Together” emphasises the main mission: “No Longer Strangers – Pilgrims”, which refers to idea of pilgrimage together towards full visible unity, rather than ecumenical institutions acting and speaking on behalf of their churches. It does not mean blurring the differences between churches, or blurring the differences between cultures or traditions – they have their own ways of praying and worshipping.

CTBI promotes good inter-religious relations across Britain and Ireland and would like to help Christians to relate to people of other faiths without compromising their own beliefs. Other areas of interest are racial relations, political violence, war and refugees, and also problems caused by migration. This leads to problems and questions about individual identity, but also the role and position of cultural traditions. Another area of activity is the issue of climate change and protecting the environment.

The Irish Council of Churches was founded in 1923 in the aftermath of the civil war. ICC describes itself as a formal national body through which member churches formally engage, dialogue and act on wide variety of issues; as “Christian Communions in Ireland willing to join in united efforts to promote the spiritual, physical, moral and social welfare of the people and the extension of the rule of Christ among all nations and over every region of human life” (www.irishchurches.org).

The list of ICC members seems very interesting: the Antiochian Orthodox Church, Church of Ireland, Cherubim and Seraphim, Greek Orthodox Church, Lutheran Church in Ireland, Methodist Church in Ireland, Irish District of Mora-
vian Church, Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church, Romanian Orthodox Church, Presbyterian Church, Religious Society of Friends, Redeemed Christian Church of God (the newest member and largest migrant-led church with over 15,000 members throughout Ireland), Russian Orthodox Church and Ireland Division of Salvation Army. This list clearly shows a diversity of churches and denominations in Ireland, but it also shows the activity of migrant-led churches. This may seem a very positive contribution to building good inter community and inter religious relations on the island, including Ulster.

However, what is striking is the lack of the Roman Catholic Church among ICC members. Some clue might be found in the period in which the ICC was founded – it was the time of partition and establishing of the state of Northern Ireland. All seven “founding fathers” of the ICC were Protestant churches and in the nineteen-twenties Catholics were seen as a threat and a dangerous minority.

Still, in 1973 in the midst of The Troubles, the ICC began talks with the Catholic Church. After some time these meetings became more formalized as the Irish Inter Church Meeting. The meeting is coordinated by a committee which meets four times a year. The Inter Church Committee is formed from the leadership of churches, made up of 50/50 representation from Irish Bishops Conference and the Council. The Irish Inter Church Meeting is a forum for discussion and exchange between ICC members and the Roman Catholic Church; every year IICM discuss different issue, for instance the 27th Inter Church Meeting is focused on mission and evangelisation.

Irish Churches Peace Project (www.icpp.info) is a very interesting and local initiative of the four largest churches: Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Methodist and the Irish Council of Churches. ICPP is a project supported by The European Union's PEACE III Programme. The ICPP slogan or – as they put it – “vision” is “A peaceful and stable society... a shared and better future for all”. ICPP cooperates with local statutory and community agencies to promote good relations, cultural diversity, equality and social cohesion. One ICPP project, “A cultural journey – a journey in understanding and benefitting from cultural diversity for 'new residents' and 'locals' that took place in September and October 2014 in Kilkeel, was a series of cultural events, whose main goal was to explain and understand the culture of residents – local Protestant and Catholics – but also cultures of migrants, including Poles.
According to Peace III Programme priorities, ICPP activity is focused on six geographic targets:

- An urban inter-face area North Belfast/East Belfast
- A border area lacking inward investment: Starbane Council area (number 1 most deprived Council area)
- A provincial town with significant sectarian/racial challenges: Craigavon Council
- A rural area with significant levels of deprivation: Newry and Mourne Council (number 4 most deprived Council area)
- A cross-border area: the area encompassed by Clogher Diocese (of the Church of Ireland)
- Armagh, Dungannon, Cookstown

Any of these targets is a challenge and will take a lot of work and commitment. However, as ICPP claims, “they have been chosen to demonstrate that good relations, reconciliation and peace work are both needed in, and can be carried out by, the churches in diverse context”. The biggest advantage of ICPP in realizing those goals is local clergy and ICPP staff, people who know and understand local citizens, who sometimes personally experienced the same traumatic situations. The goals are local and practical, and that’s the reason why these actions may actually impact communities.

ICPP also defines its main objectives:

- mapping – to identify levels of marginalisation, segregation and isolation along with church-led and other good relations work taking place or being undertaken;
- to facilitate dialogue within churches and between churches and target groups on good relations and reconciliation issues;
- supporting local cross-community groups to initiate projects;
- facilitating inter-church learning in good relations, reconciliation and peace work;
- encouraging joint approaches by the churches to good relations, reconciliation and peace work issues.

ICPP promotes and enables dialogue between all communities living in Northern Ireland, but also helps residents to communicate and understand, to talk about difficult issues. It also supports local peace and reconciliation initiatives, especially
long-term initiatives. ICPP arranges meetings, conferences and sports events, where people of different cultural origins can meet and get to know one another.

One ICPP cultural event was the Mid-Ulster Celebration of Peace. Clergy and members of local churches and schools in Mid-Ulster lead a programme of events to mark the International Day of Peace in September 2014. Over the weekend, schools, churches and the wider community gathered, in both Dungannon and Cookstown, to mark the day through art, music and singing.

Another example of ICPP activity is the cultural event “Cultural Experience” held in Newry and Mourne on April 2014. Newry and Mourne has become an increasingly diverse society. The event brought people from Western and Eastern Europe, America, Africa and Asia together with local people to explore the benefits of experiencing different cultures and issues of cultural diversity in Northern Ireland. Participants told about their own experience of migration, could listen to music from Hungary, Argentina and Israel, watched films and take part in panel discussion about cultural traditions, statistics on migration and on attitudes towards migrants in Northern Ireland.

Also acts of violence towards churches – like a serious attack on a Catholic church in Kilkeel (which destroyed and broke statues, and the damaged interior) on July 2014 and an attack on a Jewish synagogue in Belfast in July were condemned by Protestant and Catholic clergy. This seems to be “good practice”, and might be an example of cooperation and building good relations between different churches.

However, a real proof of cooperation is the shift in attitudes towards mixed marriages. As I mentioned earlier, in Northern Ireland the overall attitude of the Catholic and Protestant churches to one another has been negative, even antagonistic, and this has carried over into their views of mixed marriages. Traditionally in Ireland marriage can be conducted by a Catholic priest if children will be brought up in the Catholic faith. But there were strong objections from most of the Protestant denominations to mixed marriage, particularly marriage with a Catholic. Deep theological differences and opposition to the teachings and practice between Catholic Church and Protestant denominations were the reason for strong objections to mixed marriage – and in reality in Northern Ireland “mixed marriage” means marriage between Catholic and Protestant. Thus, Catholic and Protestant clergy have rather tried to discourage couples planning inter-church marriage and when such marriages did occur, to make sure that children would be brought up within their church.

This attitude has changed in last 10 years. There is an international commission on mixed marriage in which the Catholic Church and many Protestant churches
participate, and there is an Inter-Church Standing Committee on Mixed Marriage in Northern Ireland.

There are also initiatives in relation to joint pastoral care for mixed marriage couples and willingness to try to accommodate couples by the format of the marriage ceremony. In the Catholic Church priests on the ground are urged to be more open to people coming to discuss mixed marriage, to welcome the couple and to give them as much help as possible. Similar attitudes were observed among the Methodist, Presbyterian and Church of Ireland clergy. However, mixed marriage is not a common experience for local, Catholic or Protestant, clergy. There are only about 5 percent in the province, and most of them in big cities and urban areas. “In the Catholic Church, and to a lesser extent the Church of Ireland, the position taken by the local bishop is often crucial and may set the tone for the whole diocese. On the other hand in Protestant churches with a more devolved governmental structure, such as the Presbyterian church, where individual ministers and congregations have high levels of autonomy, there may be marked differences between neighbouring churches” (Morgan, Smyth, Robinson, Fraser 1996; http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/csc/reports).

Mixed marriages may be seen as agents of reconciliation. They prove that religious and ethnic boundaries can be crossed. Marriage between Catholics and Protestants create an opportunity for the rest of family and friends and an occasion for cross-religious meetings, getting know one another.

For a very long time relations between conflicted communities were rather rare, based on mutual fear and mistrust, and negative stereotypes, and for that reason Catholics and Protestants of Ulster haven’t known much about one another (Mauryna Crozier 1993). Mixed marriage means “mixing” people from different ethnic groups, different cultural traditions, and this may be seen as “a step too far”, a dangerous precedent, or even as an act of treachery – and this used to be “punished” by paramilitaries, even with death.

Even nowadays the position of mixed marriages and children from these marriages is difficult. In most cities and villages of Northern Ireland, segregation is still functioning, there are Catholic or Protestant areas and streets, and when it comes to school, “in the coded language of Northern Ireland, asking which school someone attended is a way of establishing his or her religions and political affiliation: indeed the legally required fair employment monitoring procedures used by employers frequently uses the name of the primary school attended by an employee or job applicant as a basis for assigning community membership” (Morgan, Smyth, Robinson, Fraser 1996). For that reason, and also to support reconciliation, Northern Ireland execu-
tive and Northern Ireland Housing Executive started “share housing” programme to build “mixed” estates open to Catholics, Protestants and other groups living in Ulster. It this cultural context support from local clergy could be priceless.

**Individual acts of reconciliation**

Institutional background for reconciliation is important, because it creates opportunities for meetings, for sharing experiences and even for living together in neighbourhood, but in the end reconciliation is the individual act of willingness to forgive and to reconcile.

There are examples of cooperation and good relations between Ulster’s Catholics and Protestants at work or in other public places and situations, like pubs and restaurants, places where people gather and meet. However, these are not acts of reconciliation, but rather simple acts of cooperation on daily basis.

It seems that the past and above all social memory is an important part of reconciliation – to reconcile does not mean to forget, but rather to forgive. The biggest problem in process of reconciliation is the remembrance of the Troubles, acts of violence and victims of paramilitaries. Ethnic conflict creates an unusual situation (and also political context) in which social memory cannot evolve naturally and often cannot be freely publicly presented. In a situation of conflict or war, social memory, like many other social spaces and activities, is subordinated to actual political strategies of conflict. So it becomes a kind of “cultural weapon” used by both sides of conflict, but particularly by paramilitaries or political parties. These social actors control the public or civic space and decide what is to be remembered (and in the same time – what is to be forgotten) and how it is presented (Bryan 2000; Jarman 1997; Bryan, Gillespie 2005). On the other hand, there are individual-victims or members of victims’ families, suffering and expecting justice. But in the reality of Northern Ireland, ex-soldiers and former members of paramilitaries are members of local government or assembly, walking free.

However, there are examples on individual actions of forgiveness and reconciliation between victims or victims’ families of republican or loyalist paramilitaries. On October 2013 Belfast was commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Shankill Bombing – an attack from the IRA who planted a bomb on Frissel’s fish shop. Eleven people died, including one IRA soldiers (or, depending on your standpoint, terrorist). In a television programme on Ulster TV, victims’ family member, Charlie Butler met Mark Rodgers, son of an Irish Catholic, murdered by UDF in response
to the IRA attack on Frissel’s shop. Mark Rodgers said that they are both victims of paramilitaries, and they shook hands. A week later they went to Greysteel, co. Londonderry, and put flowers near the Rising Sun bar, where 20 years ago loyalist paramilitaries shot Catholics in response to the Shankill Bombing.

Conclusion

Regular Social Attitudes Survey show quite high church attendance among Northern Irish Society, especially in Catholic population. It seems to have dropped in the last 10 years, but is still high. The churches still play a central role in the lives of individuals and in social and community life. One must remember, that influence of the churches in Northern Ireland extends beyond sacramental events and they have a significant influence on education, affiliated sports, recreational clubs, and above all on national identity, political aspiration and cultural background. The position of churches and actions of clergy is rather complicated – they support the reconciliation process, but they also support their believers and parishioners. For many of them, the difference between Catholic and Protestant is not simply a matter of personal faith, but above all of political and moral obligation. This kind of attitude re-creates ethnic and cultural boundaries, makes them even stronger.

Still, what occurred to me during my research in Belfast (October 2012, 2013), was that people of Ulster seemed really interested in living a “normal” life: shopping, meeting with friends, having a good job. I believe that in general Northern Ireland society has been tired-out by conflict and everlasting fighting and that is the reason why they supported the Good Friday Agreement and peace process. There can be no doubt that the peace process and reconciliation will take a long time and this is the project – and the task – for future generations. And without a doubt, the main Northern Ireland churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant churches, which were involved in one way or another in the conflict, could play important role in the process of reconciliation. There is a space for all Northern Ireland churches to help and support individuals as well as the peace process.
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The Bridge on the River. European Converts to Islam and the Question of Reconciliation
This paper engages European converts to Islam as agents of reconciliation. They belong simultaneously to two different worlds: born into one culture, through conversion they reach out to a different one on the other side of the river. For some it is a simple process of crossing and not looking back, while for others it is rather like standing over the river with either foot on a different bank. Of these, some want to be bridges themselves, holding the two banks together. Others, however, being pushed and pulled from both sides, end up in the murky waters of uncertain belonging. Based on case studies, this presentation will explore the issues of reconciliation from the perspective of identity and belonging.

**Why Conversion and Reconciliation?**

In its simplest terms religious conversion can be described as a change from one religious belief to another\(^1\) indicating that *change* is indeed both its nature and the very essence lying at the heart of religious conversion. In fact, whether sudden and quick or gradual and protracted, whether complete or only partial, change is the defining feature of a conversion process. Conversion does not necessarily have to be a bridge burning act which differentiates in an ultimate way the crossing from the outside to the inside of the border.

Through conversion a person does not become a Muslim, it is rather the new Muslim they become: This, aside from the embryo of the new “me”, involves a reaction from the new “us” going arm in arm with the reaction from the new “them”. The impact of conversion transcends negotiations with both sides and also involves an internal re-evaluation of personal notions that must change with the changed religion. One’s views on personal life, on social interactions, and finally, on politics are not detached or unaffected. Every convert needs to reconcile themselves with(in) the new milieu.

It challenges the convert with questions which, although having been answered in the past, need to be re-answered as the old responses are no longer sufficient or valid. Who am I? What is my place in the world? What does it mean? These rudiments are examined, perhaps even for the first time, and in order to gain a perspective furnishing a comprehensible and ordered picture of the world, often the convert needs to scrutinise things that so far were perhaps too obvious to even be looked at.

Conversion may, and may not, involve a dramatic turnabout in one’s life; it might be a change completely at odds with a previous lifestyle or a logical consequence and development, while the earlier cognitive structure and its components might have been either shaken by the change of religious affiliation or remain an ontological fundament for new religious orientation. Conversion can be an act of rebellion or an act of coming home. It may concern people who have already been on a religious quest or those spiritually indifferent or ignorant, who never experienced religious upbringing or were never interested in faith-related issues. Converts may undergo a number of radical changes in their devotional practices, but also behaviour, lifestyles, the fibre of their social networks and the like. Such realignment sometimes involves repudiation of a sinful past and sometimes an embrace of a glorious future; it is a process that can either be rooted in the individual or triggered by the group influence and hence either internally or externally oriented.

‘Us’ versus ‘Them’, Present versus Past

Society consists of groups and groupings, this is a wide known truism. Societal classification of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is the most prevalent characteristic of the subjective social order. Consequently, one must consider in what sense the ‘us’ changes with conversion and how it affects ‘them’. Does the convert switch sides and perceive the former ‘us’ as the present ‘them’ or is it rather a conceptual increment that includes ‘us’ in a new group that initially was not there? Another problematisation is the place of the self in the new configuration: Is there still ‘me’ or was it replaced by a group identity? Is the present ‘me’ identical with the ‘me’ of the past? How to reconcile the two?

When an individual meets an individual in a social interaction they do not necessarily behave as two separate persons, rather, the interaction is based on their respective membership in two clearly delineated societal groups, just as happens during encounters of football fans supporting different teams. Converts, who live in a situation of constant identity comparison, strive to retain distinctiveness while maintaining integrity; the establishment of distinctiveness results in attachment to ‘ideologized positions’, such as the question of burka bans or Palestine, which in

principle neutral, through their reference to super-ordinate values become endowed with emotional significance. In such situations, clashes seem imminent and unavoidable.

The only right place to start this ‘us’ and ‘them’ conceptualisation is the momentous breakthrough that shakes converts’ whole ontological and epistemological universe as well as changes to their entire life to the extent that even semantically defines them as a group. Conversion has the potential to transform the whole intellectual, emotional and social life of an individual, and may compel the person to make serious adjustments in their lifestyle (e.g. quit drinking) or even start anew e.g. in the cases of some prison conversions, ending the life of crime and beginning a new career. Personal attachments or a strong liking for practicing believers might be central to a conversion process or might be irrelevant. Time-wise, conversion can be a sudden and brief experience or a prolonged process happening over months or even years. The types and modes of conversion change over time and place, they also change across religions: In terms of scope of enquiry this paper is limited to an analysis of European conversions to Islam.

Perceived either as a process or as a single phenomenon, conversion demarcates the first line that distinguishes the group within society. Conversion is one of these identity markers of which Tajfel\(^3\) writes, that force most individuals involved to act in terms of their group membership. Conversion thus is a borderline, a point of junction of dichotomies: God and the world, the eternal and the temporal, the individual and the community of believers; a choice drawn together along unique lines of open borderland specifying one’s identity and belonging among inimitable dimensions. Representing a boundary from within and from without, conversion invokes debates on the nature of religious engagement and its potential to infuse conflicts or be a force of reconciliation; it is full of contradictions and paradoxes and questions our knowledge of the self, the society and religion.

**Bridging the Divides**

The common meaning of a border denominates a separating edge, a frontier that divides elements within from the ones beyond it. Conceptualisation of conversion in terms of boundary crossing requires an analysis of the border in its personal

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and social sense and therefore focuses on soft borders, i.e. highly metaphorical and symbolic lines, whose shape depends to a large degree on a definition of not so tangible phenomena like right and wrong or good and evil. What the anthropologists discovered long ago, political scientists must be reminded of: It is not only the borders of states that are porous and in some cases have vanished altogether, it is also the boundaries between the social milieus that are harder to find and easier to cross – even involuntarily. The more itinerant the self becomes, the more often and freely it moves across the societal spectrum and is constantly redefined in terms of norms, values and social categories, both those ascribed and those acquired. Some are easier to notice and cross than others, the transition can be sudden or gradual; sometimes it also leads through a grey area of a no-man’s-land. Certain borders may be traversed in only one direction, and while some are crossed once in a lifetime, others are encountered daily. Furthermore, when mapping social boundaries, one needs to remember that the richness and complexity, described by Marx as “a tapestry of blurred borders” of reality, makes them partial and limited with respect to what they include, exclude, separate and bring together, what they put in conflict with each other and what they reconcile.

But as much as conversion is a metaphorical boundary crossed, it is a boundary created, too. In this respect religion itself is a social border that marks and orders membership in communities as well as a cultural boundary that demarcates a line between different worlds of meanings. The disappearance of space between various narrative universes in modern pluralist societies does not mean a simultaneous disappearance of borders, to the contrary – they have become central to our understanding of identity and security. Boundaries do not always disappear simply because of an accretion of mobility. Contrariwise, the migratory and ever-changing nature of modern society is conducive to feelings of insecurity and thus borders are erected for protection. It is very common that for the sake of securing the new identity, the convert is discouraged from maintaining those out-group relations that can be harmful to it and is prompted to remain entirely within the perimeter

of the new religious milieu. Those with relatively short “tenure” tend to be dissuaded from attending Christian services (like christenings, weddings and funerals or other family occasions) or indulging in activities (like dancing) that may bring them back to old habits and ways of life. For those who just entered into the world of Islam, there is a need for strongly emphasized boundaries dividing the old from the new. Fixity and impenetrability of the barrier, which is largely cast in religious terms, is the more pronounced, the more fragile the inner spectrum is. Conversely, the more unwavering, comfortable and established the new identity is, the more interaction and engagement with what there is beyond the border. Nevertheless, even when borders are established and stable (and they tend to be as the time after shahada passes), they are still characterised by continuous change and negotiation. If the line itself does not shift, it might still be subject to repeated redefinition.

This paper argues that in order to understand conversion’s peace-building potential, we need to know whether this identity realignment is built on positive (inclusion, acceptance) or negative (exclusion, rejection) foundations. Furthermore, this paper claims that convert identity provides an infallible blueprint for understanding the world and rejection/acceptance as well as inclusion/exclusion dyads are decisive agents in the reconciliation process both inwardly and outwardly directed.

The Four Archetypes

The process of identifying with others, understood as choosing where we want to belong hinges either on inclusion through lack of awareness of differences; as a result of perceived resemblances, or on exclusion due to a repudiation of dissimilarities. Belonging can progress twofold: either the self is disassociated from the group to which the individual hitherto belonged and the old “us” becomes “them” or the “us” category is enlarged and encompasses the old “them” which vanishes as a distinct signifier. The issue at stake here is thus the reformulation of the “other” taking either the shape of amputation and rejection or, to the contrary, the incorporation of a new aspect to the ideational body. There are two way of responding, either one builds on what they have had up to date, or one tries to cut everything off and constructs one’s new Muslim identity based on differences in contrast to the previous life style. Consequently, the structural feature of belonging refers to the

If *shahada* (Muslim profession of faith) brings converts together, their identity as European New Muslims (ENM) sets them apart, and constitutes the key to understanding the spectrum of what it means to be Muslim and to delineate the normative space of belonging. Thus, the ideational dimension renders the impartial knowledge about the factors crucial for peacebuilding implications within the context of reconciliation. For these reasons the theoretical framework of this paper is based on the identity-belonging nexus. This theoretical approach develops the understanding of the relationship between the discursive and normative constituents of being an ENM and their role in the relationship between the individual and the group. The dynamic between belonging (inclusion/exclusion) and identity (acceptance/rejection) creates four archetypes of ENM: Ambassador, Bridge, Lost and Castaway.

![Figure 1. The Typology of European Converts to Islam.](image)

The Bridge archetype emerges when one’s identity is created on the foundation of rejection and at the same time, instead of limiting the normative spaces of belonging, is opened towards conquering new territories and including new communi-
ties into one’s existential sphere. Lost archetype signifies an identity where acceptance of the new incessantly clashes with the exclusion of the old sense of belonging in their social, cultural and behavioural dimensions. The Castaway archetype draws upon the stories of individuals whose lives at the crossroads of personal history and the conducive environment constitute a unique coalescence of rejection and exclusion. Finally, the Ambassador indicates an identity archetype whereby acceptance and inclusion are instruments for internalising the differences and enhancing the pluralism of ideas countering radicalisation by reducing societal conflicts. This paper focuses solely on the Ambassador archetype, as the epitome of reconciliation agency and peace-building force. Other types will not be discussed but a detailed analysis of the research including its methodology is available elsewhere.

The Sources of Conflict

My research proved that only few converts are able to fully reconcile their past and present and future, and establish a secure place where shared values can intensify both the sense of identity based on acceptance and engagement with the society that synthesises multiple belongings. While some of the converts create the new identity via heterogeneous, symbiotic social contacts which facilitate diverse encounters and open up a space for dialogue and diminish the rejective responses, many treat identity as a protective cocoon aimed at strengthening the fragile chrysalis of the new self during the process of metamorphosis.

Converts are also somewhat ‘involuntary’ agents of reconciliation and dialogue between various communities:

“When interfacing with the rest of society, you are made to make a comment on things that happened all over the world in regards to your religion. In a way you are forced to become a spokesperson for the occurrences in the world that are related to Islam. You are expected to have an opinion on situations, which is not necessary true in individual conflicts; yet, it is demanded of you to ‘must know something’ as you are a Muslim. It is not right, as a

convert to Islam you should not be expected to make a comment about something when you have only recently made Islam your religion.”

Not everyone can cope with these value choices hence some escape them by withdrawal into a space where they are not necessary – avoiding interactions with the outside, or they just get lost in the grey area between, creating their own spaces of unique hybridity. Another possible solution is creating two parallel social realms: for instance when colleagues at work are not aware of the denominational change, there are two separate circles of social interactions.

Failing to take root in any of the groups and in the end belonging nowhere fully, they reaffirm the differences instead of focusing on similarities and are not well equipped to deal with those attributes that are ascribed to them. In practice this means, for instance, a preference for non-religious friends who themselves do not have strong beliefs opting for an easy way to manifest the minority status in a majority context, which is not a difficult task when the other person does not care whether or not you are Muslim. Conversely, the longer the convert stays in the community, the more multi-layered and nuanced his impression is as the freshly converted person is inept at dealing with contrasting expectations and with the ascribed abstract image of a convert attributed to them.

Sometimes, an acceptance of Islam requires a simultaneous exclusion, i.e. cutting ties with the previous social environment, including the family in more dramatic cases. Close interactions with wider society are perceived as dangerous, as they might have a negative influence especially in the case of “young” converts who have just taken their shahada. These concerns are expressed not only regarding religious activities (e.g. funerals or weddings taking places in Christian places of worship – there is an admonition not to go as in the first place, it is forbidden under Islam. The converts are allowed to go but only if they behave as in a museum otherwise such act would be considered blasphemy), but also cutting social ties is sometimes necessary as old friends may encourage bad habits and practices like going to pubs and clubs or drinking alcohol. Unfortunately, the more that is excluded from the convert’s existential sphere, the more alien those remaining outside the membership bonds become, losing their individuality and becoming simply a collective of non-Muslims, or kuffar (infidels).

This is especially pronounced when the in-group’s norms, values and beliefs are dramatically different from those endorsed by wider society or, as described by Sam and Virta, when the individual lives simultaneously in two different cultures, a feature prominent in the lives of majority of European converts. Balancing the two can be successful or can be quite tragic. This is so, particularly because minority/majority status is to a large extent dependent on individual perception and can be changed by a minor detail like a headscarf, for instance. Typically the less you know about the “other” the more prejudiced and stereotyping your stance is, but in the case of converts we face a different situation when the more you know the “other” the more disenchanted you are.

The Uniqueness of Ambassadors

In the midst of deep divisions among European converts to Islam across ideological lines, on which the very principles of what it means to be a Muslim are questioned, the Ambassador archetype represents individuals for whom conversion is based upon acceptance and inclusion, the reconciliation of the old with the new, with all elements working in unison. Ambassadors are not tussled between contending perspectives like the Lost archetype, nor are they temporary and on the move as Bridges tend to be, neither do they shed their old selves in the same way snakes shed their skins and reify or obfuscate the community as in the case of Castaways. Ambassadors offer a registry of solutions to potential conflicts and represent some sense of a middle path between the other archetypes that stand divided on ideas central to the lives of European converts to Islam and the issue of them being a security issue.

A European who is converting to Islam needs to nest elements of a different culture which sometimes are so merged with religion that it can be impossible to tell them apart within the indigenous cultural milieu. Roy observes that some converts

mary culture with religion, while others try to distil it from any cultural influences emphasizing the universal, acultural nature of Islam and to integrate Islam into their indigenous culture. This is precisely where Ambassadors offer a rich registry of solutions rooted in the practice of reconciliation, e.g. when visiting a married convert couple in Yorkshire I was given a *halal* version of toad in a hole, an ideal example of the continuity and compatibility of the corresponding social and religious identities. More often, however, the earlier identity was given up for the sake of new, cultural-religious construct expressed in dress, dietary habits and even language.

Lucy always wears a headscarf in public and in the first period after conversion she also used to wear a full robe so she looked like a traditional Muslim. She tells me she was often mistaken for an Arab or - a pale Pakistani and told to “go home” by her compatriots unable to comprehend that she has been born in the Lake District. Working in hospitals she quite often hears old ladies who exclaim “My dear! Isn’t her English exceptionally good?” Lucy only smiles and shakes her head, never bothering to explain that it is indeed the case because English is the only language she speaks. I have the feeling she knows how to pick her battles and understands that the majority of people do not venture beyond their visual impressions. Where other converts I met would start an argument based on their hurt feelings or perceived discrimination, Lucy is placid and distanced. Ambassadors are well prepared and equipped to engage in discussions on the general meaning of identity and transfer the conceptualisation of being a Muslim from the strictly cultural idiom to the more universal religious sphere. Cultural and religious identities are strongly securitised and presented as societal problems often having political repercussions. As Mouritsen observes, “culture concerns the progress and perfectibility of norms, identities and practices in relation to the communal life and political affairs,” and thus for Lucy Islam is not something cultural. When people ask her “Do you cook curry?” she responds, “Well, actually I am British, my husband is British.”

This middle way, a reconciliation of diverse universes, is the most defining feature of the Ambassador archetype. It does not mean syncretism or patch-working an

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15 Interviewees’ names are changed due to ethical considerations.


eclectic amalgam of different bits and pieces. It is an ability to transcend borders and divisions; holism of diversity based on an acceptance of different approaches and inclusion that brings peace and understanding.

For Ambassadors, lowering the “cultural Muslimness” threshold has necessitated defining which values and traits characterise a Muslim and on the other hand has widened the concept so that certain purely cultural traits do not screen out individuals who do not possess them. Frequently, the message coming from Muslim communities, especially those dominated by one ethnic group, suggest that newcomers must learn to appreciate the common culture and relegate much of their own background to the private realm. Ambassadors explicitly reject the powerful kultur-Islam as a gatekeeper and integrator screening out intruders who are impervious to the cultural aspect of the community. In the world where the dominant rhetorical style of Muslim community revolves around “unity in diversity”, still the idea of Leitkultur remains unresolved and begs the question, particularly in the European context, what type and degree of cultural sameness is required. The Ambassador archetype follows the ambiguity of social constructivism and points to the discrepancies between the traits the community thinks it has in common and those that are shared in reality as well as the equivocality of empirical differences rejecting the equation presuming binary opposition between two equally essentialised forms of culture.

“I used to think this that Muslims communities should know better [this] sort of thing, but of course they would not. There are certain cultural practices that are based on the religion but that have become warped, and, of course, the classic one for us is Christmas… So of course, because it happened with Christianity, it’s a bit older, it is now happening with Islam.”18

The fact that the Ambassador archetype does not agree with counter-posing the religious and cultural elements of their identity and refuses the latter to be kept at distance in the private realm and thus allowing the convert to stand as the modern, rational, “European Islam” type does not mean that the converts representing this type are barely or not religious at all. To the contrary, the perceived clash between the non-negotiable secularism and the religious highlights ambiguities in terms of the questionable status of the universalism of Islam which often slides towards the

stratum of a culture determining the competing discourses of cultural interpretations of beliefs but is carried out in a religious idiom and therefore escapes group essentialism and introduces the idea of us-ness through cultural dialogue.

Ambassadors are deeply religious and their faith has a profound impact on their lives. Describing people who deny that Islam is a way of life, Lucy told me how false and unjust such a statement is. Simultaneously, her account of what “a way of life” means and what is the nature of the change summarizes the Ambassadors’ outlook on their conversion experience and explains why she does not have to cook curry to prove she is fully Muslim: “I did not believe in God before, that was a big shift for me. But once you put God in place it changes everything. It does not change what I find funny or my personality or my, you know, what makes up me, but it changes my perspective on things so - it does change everything.”

Strict religious observance in the case of the Ambassador archetype does not mean acceptance of a purely cultural imprint, this cliché is visible in many aspects of their lives. Ambassadors do not plunge into Islam wholeheartedly but somewhat artificially, especially in terms of rapid social changes. They do not switch their milieu from non-Islamic to entirely Islamic; instead they try to suffuse their previous environment and lifestyle with an Islamic spirit.

As opposed to the “I am Muslim – deal with it” attitude displayed by the Lost and, to some extent, Bridge archetypes, Ambassadors represent rather “I am who I am” approach. They do not advertise the fact of their religious denomination, conversely they live their religion and thus it becomes apparent through their deeds rather than declarations.

“It was at first I thought…Now we are integrated and we are who we are and that is it. But until you incorporate your full Islamic values with your daily practical routine, you do feel to be leading [double life]… I have got my Muslim hat on today but I have also got my work hat on today. And it did take a while for the two to feel like they were integrated.”

It is impossible, while an Ambassador archetype insists, to be a private Muslim with private spiritual pursuits; each Muslim must be a member of a wider civic and political culture. Affirming and internalising Islam, in the case of Ambassadors

leads directly to sharing and learning to coexist. Such coexistence is the ability to navigate and transcend in a tolerant, understanding, self-critical approach to one's own traditions or intercultural dialogue. There is nothing like black and white for an Ambassador type, they live in a fullness of colours.

From all perspectives, cultural and religious pluralism as well as recalcitrant identities require the person to examine their own partialities and to enter into dialogue with conflictual issues as constitutive elements of community. The most important factor for Ambassadors is that the core "us" remains the same; conversion changes it only in the sense of enlargement and thus makes it possible to rework a culture nexus based on a politics of identity contestation and deliberative participating, which reopens negotiations, mobilizes reinterpretation and facilitates dialogue and reconciliation. From this perspective becoming and being a Muslim for Ambassadors is more an enrichment than a change in the sense of transforming or adding more instead of taking away.

The ability to retain what is crucial and accept what is inevitable affords Ambassadors a particular strength to keep their integrity. In Lucy’s words “it is not like you are a Muslim in one part and a doctor in another part and [then] British. It is kind of like all complementing one another, so it comes together.” Lucy told me that creating these false dichotomies is not fair. She asked me if anyone would ever think to tell her to choose whether she is a mother or a daughter. Such a choice is obviously impossible as she is both and cannot possibly prefer one over the other. Divisions therefore seem to be nothing more than following the extreme.

“...because you have become Muslim, any non-Muslim who meets you thinks they can ask you any question under sun…Of course, if you cannot answer their questions, they think they are right because you are obviously, for some bizarre reason, the oracle of all knowledge of Islam. So if you cannot answer their questions then somehow Islam must be wrong. It was a strange thing, but then at the same time, it definitely motivated me to go find out... And of course you learn more and more and more, so of course in some ways it is a good thing.”21

Thus, the Ambassador manoeuvres among their own lack of knowledge and the ignorance of their friends. After his conversion Peter noticed that not only very few

of his non-Muslim friends knew anything about Islam (and he thought that maybe if they did they might have actually wanted to become Muslims or at least his decision might seem less strange to them) but also, more worryingly, he discovered that there are many born-Muslims that know nothing or next to nothing about their own religion.

The willingness to tackle problems as opposed to remaining blind to them suffuses both private and social aspects of the Ambassador archetype. The Ambassador is well aware of the simplistic and reductionist interpretations of the Muslim community in Europe which fracture Western society in two but at the same time he has an intimate knowledge of his brothers and sisters in Islam and does not pretend that there are no problems on the Muslim side, as they do not confuse reality and the ideal society. This knowledge of both communities enables them to prevent contact zones turning into conflict zones as often happens when Muslims and indigenous Europeans interact. Ambassadors offer discourse and practices that dismantle the fractures and ruptures and are able to transmit their values tied to identity and community irrespectively of the religious change.

Ambassadors are not only active in their immediate local environment but also their general civic engagement is quite high. Simultaneously they cannot be compared to radicals who, politicising religion, use an undefined “they” in order to manipulate the discourse in a paranoid reaction to the world that is against them. By contrast, he observes, “that is a very different kind of mentality to being at peace, realizing that everything is in God’s hands.” This shows that being rationally grounded does not mean that the Ambassador is not spiritual in his outlook. To the contrary, this holistic approach endows Ambassadors with the rare ability of navigating among the rocks of the unknown with delicacy and ease. In the first place they never lose the big picture so they are not easily swayed by minor disputes or debates.

The Ambassador archetype embraces, understands and applies diversity. But simultaneously it does not mean that everything is allowed and everyone is accepted in a sort of “let us celebrate everything and everybody” attitude what would make them not have any opinion in case they offend someone. To the contrary, the Ambassador acknowledges reasonable diversity but assumes a homogenous interpretation of Islam and insists that any allusion to violence goes way beyond the core of the settlement. Furthermore, although Ambassadors recognise the legitimacy of other groups, the rights of individuals to their belonging, their opinions are quite

pronounced and during our conversation Lucy calmly explained me the superiority of Islam over other religions: “I am a Muslim, and I do not mean to... I am not trying to insult any Christians or Jews or... I think Islam is more balanced.” Simultaneously, this does not render her discourse exclusive or inaccessible.

And the Ambassador archetype is a key element of this development. Immersed in the context of the process of becoming a Muslim they exercise fully what Klaus Eder calls “the inevitable scandal of inclusion” and propose a heterodox solution offering the New Muslim community the possibility to express themselves in their full diversity neutralising cultural differences of believers through religious unity. Ambassadors abandon the theoretical assumption of a hierarchy of belongings which is replaced by the idea of a network of cross-cutting identifications working in unison within a common frame, and are held together by Islam, in which every cultural difference is pushed to the backstage. Islam as an encompassing unity prevents these from producing dynamics that would be prone to radicalisation. This way Ambassadors are given a sense of overarching belonging which means different things to different groups and is normatively influenced by the dialogue between several distinct voices that conceptualise different converts’ narratives. With their continuous insertion of new memories and projects the Ambassadors customize and reinvent Islam in order to address the transformation of the direction and the nature of the belief in Europe and provide the framework that corresponds to real life discourse about New Muslim identities.

The main criticism towards converts is that converts are *en bloc* more radical in their religiosity in the sense that they are less compromising, less willing to negotiate between their old and new identities. Ambassadors see the important differences that exist, the main concern being the fit between particularistic cultures and universal principles of Islam. Criticism of identities also involve their reconstruction and thus the Ambassador archetypes builds the new European dimension daily as well as the meaning of Islam by the nature of contextualization. Undoubtedly, in the future this will lead to the emergence of national versions of Islam whereby Islam is going to be customized to particular historical and cultural circumstances of European countries as undeniably values become charged with emotions by

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linkage to history and culture. This also makes the Ambassador archetype the true ambassador of Islam in Europe and the beacon of reconciliation.

A Way to Go for Social Sciences

The great majority of research on conversion phenomenon discuss a situation where an individual meets religion purely in a material sense and the eschatological aspects are entirely absent in the analyses and although it is not always the spiritual sphere of religiosity that prompt conversion, in some instances conversion indeed is a story of an individual’s meeting with God. On the one hand, the field is so dominated by rational approaches that strictly religious elements were belittled, especially that the mystical dimension of conversion escapes the tools of social sciences. On the other hand, researchers tend to think about conversions metaphorically and the mystical aspect remains untouched or is deemed irrelevant. Typical social science bias reduces religion to social and cultural or psychological factors ignoring the fervent zeal of genuine beliefs. This highly reductionist view, undermining the mystical aspect of religion as a source of spiritual peace and conversion as seeking of meaning and transcendence might perhaps be a consequence of rationalisation so typical for sciences, in the very nature of the sciences is the need to rationalise all social phenomena and therefore they strip the religious down to a set of convictions, a convention or purely social affair.

It is essential to investigate the religious element, not because Islam is inherently bad or inherently good (it is neither), but because even though very often radicalisation and conflictual behaviour has little to do with religiosity and radical theology (Salafism does not necessitate violence), religion is still powerfully interweaved into the narrative which attracted the radicalised individual.25 Whereas the sphere of the inner life tends to be ignored, it must be emphasized that analyses conducted only on the rational level cannot do justice and are not able to portray the whole depth or capture the much wider scope of conversion. Paying attention to the material plane only diminishes the spiritual, and no matter how nuanced our understanding of the material is, ignoring the spiritual will seriously impede any analysis. Similarly, it is wrong to ask only “what does this faith promise and to whom such promises most appeal”26 because it is not always the faith (the spiritual) but someti-

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mes a more mundane religion (material) and in the second place, various things in the same religious group will appeal to various individuals, conversely, two similar people may choose different religious groupings, or someone may convert and someone else might not.

However, in instances of conversion built on grievances, abjection and violence become a way to channel hatred and hostile feelings and project them onto the former community which epitomises the former sinful life and the old, condemned self. It is perhaps the greatest paradox of radicalisation that it actively strives to remove any boundaries by compulsory unification and homogenisation of society which in fact means enforcing borderlines. The desire to create an ideal world in which people would abide by the same laws and adhere to the same principles places a heavy weight on minor differences. Those differences ultimately become the least acceptable ones because the very nature of a boundary makes the critical divergences easy to deal with, whereas the ambiguity of small details makes them the most frustrating, and the most dangerous. The daily praxis and routine that escapes every attempt of categorisation and blurs the boundaries between spaces and times of war and peace ultimately means that even if people share nothing else, at least they have a border in common, even if they share it from opposing sides.

This proposed framework shows why individuals feeling at ease with their hitherto prevailing identity and who embrace Islam not as the essence of “the other” but as something that completes the wholeness of their personality (acceptance) are far less inclined to proceed to activities that aim at destroying the culture in which they were brought up as opposed to those who, in order to embrace Islam, feel the need to discard all that they were before the shahada (rejection). This framework also indicates that when someone not so much embraces Islam, but rejects the West and everything it represents, by excluding the whole sphere of belonging, they make themselves more vulnerable towards radicalisation. The first case resembles a situation where a church building is no longer in use for Christian services but can still serve the community as a museum or an art gallery or a mosque. In the second instance the building itself is deemed undesirable and unfit to become a mosque, so it is destroyed to give space for new structures. The former case represents the Ambassador archetype.

Bibliography


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The daily news reports from the Middle East are grim. The advance of Islamic State fighters and the atrocities they commit leave us searching for answers. What is interesting about the discourse surrounding the Middle East is the way that the questions we ask and the answers we propose often have less to do with the actual reality in the Middle East, and more to do with reality in the West, in Europe and North America. Rather than examining the roots of the Islamic State in the context of unstable regimes in Syria and Iraq and in the context of certain jihadist ideologies, the conflict there is often co-opted into, for example, Church-state issues in liberal social orders. Liberalism is born of a narrative that sees public religion as inherently divisive. The story goes that, after the Reformation introduced the Protestant-Catholic divide into European history, the two sides fought each other in bloody Religious Wars until they finally realized that the peace was best preserved by marginalizing religion from public discourse. Today in the United States, battles over what constitutes religious freedom continue to be fought against the backdrop of a narrative that sees religion as peculiarly prone to promoting violence, and thus best kept out of the public square. The Islamic State is invoked as an example, not just of jihadist ideology, but of the violence that results when religion, especially monotheistic religion, is taken seriously as the basis for structuring society.

In this talk I want to question these two related charges: that religion has a tendency to promote violence, and that monotheistic religion in particular has a tendency to promote violence. Behind these charges are two presuppositions that tend to make their way into political discourse in the West. First, secular institutions and ideologies are less prone to violence than religious ones. Second, a pluralism of truths is less prone to violence than a monotheistic emphasis on one God and truths that are universal. I will question these presuppositions in order. First, I will argue that there is no essential difference between so-called “religious” and “secular” ideas and practices, so there is no good reason for thinking that “religious” ideas and practices are more inherently prone to violence than “secular” ideas and practices. Second, I will argue that a pluralism of truths is not necessarily more peaceful than monotheism and the quest for the one true God. People kill for all sorts of things. People are just as likely to kill for their country than for a god, maybe more so, and the reason is that people treat all sorts of mundane things as if they were gods. The real issue behind violence is not whether or not one believes in God or how many gods one believes in; the real question is what god do you in fact worship? Here I will use the thought of St. John Paul II to argue that these matters ought to look very different to followers of a crucified God.
Let me be clear that I do not deny that Christians, Muslims, and others can and do use their faith to justify violence. I will not argue that, for example, their violence is really political and not religious. What I deny is that such Muslim or Christian or Buddhist violence is of an essentially different and inherently more troublesome nature than violence in the name of supposedly more mundane and “secular” realities like kings or nations or flags or freedom or oil. In fact, the idea that there is something called “religion” that is more troublesome can and is used to promote violence on behalf of secular nation-states. In post-9/11 discourse in the U.S., for example, we tell ourselves that we have a peaceful secular type of state in which religion has been tamed in the public sphere; those crazy people over there—Muslims, primarily—still mix religion with politics, which makes their politics peculiarly dangerous. Their violence is religious, and therefore irrational and divisive. Our violence, on the other hand, is secular, rational, and peacemaking. And so we find ourselves regrettably forced to bomb them into the higher rationality.

Religion and violence

The idea that religion has a peculiar tendency to promote violence depends on the ability to distinguish religion from what is not religion—the secular, in other words. But those who write on religion and violence themselves cannot maintain a coherent distinction between the religious and the secular. Renowned historian Martin Marty indicts religion for its divisiveness, but he gives seventeen different definitions of religion, then begs off giving his own definition, since “scholars will never agree on the definition of religion,” then—in lieu of a “definition”—gives five “features” of religion, then shows how politics displays all five of the same features. Mark Juergensmeyer charges religion with a peculiar tendency to exacerbate violence, but the distinction between religious and secular violence is hopelessly confused by his statements like “the secular is a sort of advanced form of religion” and “secular nationalism is ‘a religion.’”

The famous atheist Christopher Hitchens’ bestselling book God is Not Great is subtitled How Religion Poisons Everything. There he points to histories of abuses by Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, and so on. But he also faces up to the fact that atheist regimes, like those of Joseph Stalin and Kim Jong-Il, are responsible for tens of millions of deaths. Hitchens deals with this problem by declaring that atheist regimes like Stalin’s are religious too. Totalitarianism aims at human perfection, which is essentially a religious impulse, according to
Hitchens. Religion poisons everything because everything poisonous gets identified as religion. At the same time, everything good ends up on the other side of the religious/secular divide. Hitchens says of Martin Luther King Jr., “In no real as opposed to nominal sense, then, was he a Christian.” Hitchens bases this remarkable conclusion on the notion that King was nonviolent, and what is not violent cannot possibly be religious, because religion is defined as violent.

The distinction between secular and religious here is nothing more than the distinction between things Hitchens likes and things Hitchens does not like. Richard Wentz’ book Why People Do Bad Things in the Name of Religion attempts to avoid such problems with the definition of religion by openly expanding the category to include consumerism, secular humanism, faith in technology, football fanaticism, and a host of other ideologies and practices that others consider “secular.” Wentz is compelled to conclude, “Perhaps all of us do bad things in the name of religion.” Religion ends up meaning anything people take seriously, which makes the idea that people do violence for religion a tautology.

The whole argument depends on the religious/secular distinction, but no one provides a coherent argument for supposing that so-called secular ideologies such as nationalism, capitalism, Marxism, and liberalism are any less prone to encourage violence than belief in, for example, the biblical God. In fact, all of the authors I examined undercut this argument. Empirical evidence does as well. American Christians, for example, are far more willing to kill for their country than for Jesus.

Religion and violence arguments are usually directed against a list of “world religions,” which generally include Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism, Shinto, Confucianism and sometimes a few others. This approach to religion is commonly known as “substantivism,” because it is based on identifying religions by the substance of the meaning expressed in their doctrines. What separates religions from secular phenomena is described in terms of the religion’s beliefs and practices directed toward “God” or “gods” or “the transcendent” or some other identifier.

Many scholars, however, reject substantivist definitions of religion as incoherent. To include Theravada Buddhism—with no belief in God or gods—in the list of religions, the category is expanded beyond gods to include “transcendence” or some such. But “transcendence” is a Judeo-Christian category dependent on the distinction between creation and a creator God. To apply the term to Buddhism, which has no such distinction, one needs to make the category vague, but doing so makes it impossible to exclude such experiences of transcendence as nationalism or con-
sumerism from the category of religion. So some scholars employ what is known as a functionalist definition of religion. What matters is not what people claim to believe but how an ideology or practice functions in a person's life. If a person claims to believe in God but never darkens the door of a church and spends most of every day shopping on the internet, then the notion that consumerism is their religion is empirically accurate and useful. If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it’s a duck.

There is a vast literature on Marxism as a religion, for example. There is an extensive body of scholarship that explores the prevalence of civil religion in the United States. Carolyn Marvin similarly argues that “nationalism is the most powerful religion in the United States, and perhaps in many other countries.” A famous economist was quoted in the New York Times expressing his belief in free markets by saying: “I believe in that premise as a matter of religious faith.” A survey of religious studies literature finds the following treated under the rubric “religion”: totems, witchcraft, the rights of man, Marxism, liberalism, Freudianism, Japanese tea ceremonies, nationalism, sports, free market ideology, Alcoholics Anonymous and the list goes on.

Émile Durkheim may be considered the pioneer of modern functionalist approaches to religion. According to Durkheim, “a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions.” Durkheim’s definition of religion thus depends on the distinction of sacred and profane. But Durkheim does not define sacred and profane based on their content. For Durkheim, anything can be considered sacred by a given society. What matters is not content but function, how a thing works within a given society. In any society, according to Durkheim, certain things are set aside as sacred as a symbolization of communal solidarity among the members of a society. For Durkheim, it does not matter that the American flag does not explicitly refer to a god. It is nevertheless a sacred object in American society, and is thus an object of religious veneration.

If this approach seems strange, it is in fact much closer to the original sense of the Latin word religio, from which the word “religion” comes. For the Romans, the word covered all kinds of civic duties and relations that we would consider “secular.” It might refer to duties to gods, but it might refer to duties to humans. As St. Augustine wrote “We have no right to affirm with confidence that religion (religio) is confined to the worship of God, since it seems that this word has been detached from its normal meaning, in which it refers to an attitude of respect in
relations between a man and his neighbor.” In medieval Europe, the religious/secu-
lar distinction was the distinction between two types of clergy, those belonging to
an order and those belonging to a diocese. The religious/secular distinction as we
know it is a modern European invention, which comes about with the birth of the
modern state as a way of relegating the ecclesiastical authorities’ area of concern
to an essentially interior impulse called “religion,” while the civil authorities took
charge of “secular” things like political authority and the legitimate use of violence.
The religious/secular distinction was then exported to the rest of the world in the
process of European colonization, as it became useful to define the native cultures
as religious and therefore essentially private, while the colonial authorities took
care of business. It is not until the 19th century that the substantivist idea that there
is a limited set of “world religions” comes to be invented.

The basic Durkheimian insight that people treat all sorts of different things as
their “religions” does not only go back to the Romans. It is in fact a basic insight of
the Bible. The Bible labels as “idolatry” the tendency to treat created things that are
not God as if they were God. This is the subject of the first commandment. The Old
Testament sometimes, as in Isaiah 44, mocks the stupidity of the man that uses half
a block of wood to make an idol to worship, and the other half to cook his dinner.
The primary concern of the Bible, however, is not stupidity but betrayal. Rarely do
the Israelites bow down before a Golden Calf, thinking it is a real god. Most often,
the critique of idolatry is directed against those who put their trust in mere created
things, even if they don’t actually believe those things are gods. In Isaiah 31, for
example, the Israelites are accused of idolatry for putting their trust in the horses
and chariots of foreign allied armies, instead of God, to save them. This is the ap-
proach of the New Testament as well. Jesus’s admonition about God and Mammon
in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:24) makes clear that people are prone to serve
money as a god, and that one must choose between the true God and the false
one. Idolatry is not so much a matter of conceptual error as of devotion; one can
be perfectly clear that coins made of metal are not divine beings, and yet one can
be an idolater if one trusts in them to provide security. Function, not merely belief,
is the most common marker of idolatry. This is clear in the Pauline letters as well.
Colossians says greed is “the same thing as worshipping a false god” (Col. 3:5), and
Philippians decries those for whom “their god is their bellies” (Phil. 3:19).

It is important to note that idolatry is usually a matter of degree. Most forms of
idolatry, like trust, are on a continuum of more or less. Exactly when a necessary
regard for material sustenance shades into greed is not always clear. To use another
example, Israel is suffered to have kings, but sometimes they are instruments of God's purposes, and sometimes they threaten to usurp the place of God among the people. When trust in kings becomes idolatrous is not always clear.

The biblical critique of idolatry undermines the argument that religion promotes violence. For if the religion-and-violence notion depends on the religious/secular distinction, the biblical critique of idolatry makes clear that the distinction does not hold. In the biblical view, people are spontaneously worshipping creatures who treat all sorts of things as gods. The Bible recognizes only one true absolute, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but understands that people have a tendency to treat all sorts of created things as absolutes. There is no neat distinction between the world of worship and the world of mundane, purely secular, pursuits. The fact is that worship, albeit false worship, pervades the so-called secular world. There is no way to carve up the world into the essentially religious and the essentially secular if in actual empirical fact people treat all sorts of things as their “religions.”

The biblical critique of idolatry makes clear that the religious/secular distinction is an ideological, rather than purely descriptive, distinction. It does not articulate facts about the world but rather serves to draw our attention toward certain kinds of absolutism and violence and away from other kinds. The idea that religion promotes violence is often used, for example, to justify war in the name of Western-style secular government. Those Muslims over there are dangerous because they mix religion and politics, so we need to bomb them into liberalism. Hitchens, for example, criticized “religion” for its violence but was an enthusiastic supporter of the Iraq War. Despite his attempt to recruit Martin Luther King to his side, Hitchens said “And I say to the Christians while I'm at it, ‘Go love your own enemies; by the way, don't be loving mine… I think the enemies of civilization should be beaten and killed and defeated, and I don't make any apology for it.” For Hitchens, the Iraq War was part of a broader war for secularism, and the game is zero-sum. “It is not possible for me to say, Well, you pursue your Shiite dream of a hidden imam and I pursue my study of Thomas Paine and George Orwell, and the world is big enough for both of us. The true believer cannot rest until the whole world bows the knee.” The true believer Hitchens has in mind is the Islamist. But Hitchens's message is that the true believer in secularism can also not rest until the whole world has been converted to secularism—by force, if necessary.

So to sum up the argument so far: people kill for all sorts of things that they treat as gods, including supposedly “secular” things like “freedom.” This insight is nothing more startling than the biblical critique of idolatry—human beings are
spontaneously worshipping creatures whose allegiances fall on all sorts of mundane things. The point is not at all to deny that Christians and Muslims, for example, sometimes use their faith as justification for violence; the point is to level the playing field, so that we examine not just violence on behalf of jihad or Jesus, but violence on behalf of free markets and free elections. I wish to challenge the religious/secular dichotomy that causes us to turn a blind eye to liberal forms of imperialism and violence. Insofar as the myth of religious violence creates the villains against which a liberal social order defines itself, the myth is little different than previous forms of Western imperialism that established the inferiority of non-Western others and subjected them to Western power in attempt to make them more like us.

**Monotheism and violence**

Although Durkheim’s work is useful for showing that people are capable of treating all sorts of things as sacred, there is a crucial difference between Durkheim and the biblical critique of idolatry: the Bible conveys the belief that there is one true God, despite all the different forms of false worship in which people engage, while Durkheim did not believe there was a god behind any sacred regime. Durkheim thought that there is no essential difference between the rituals and taboos surrounding the flag and those having to do with God or gods because both represent a society’s symbolization of itself to itself. For Durkheim, all religion is a kind of misrepresentation. People experience the constraints of social forces beyond the individual’s control, but since these forces are too complex to understand, they give rise to mythological accounts and ritual practices. None of these accounts is true, though all of them might express some partial truth about society.

The biblical critique of idolatry, by way of contrast, is driven by the conviction that there is one God who alone should be worshipped. That is the truth. As we have seen, the biblical critique of idolatry helps to undo the distinction between religious and secular forms of worship and of violence, but it is exposed to another type of critique that sees not religion itself but monotheism as the problem. It is often argued that belief in one God demands a kind of exclusive loyalty that increases the stakes in any dispute until violence is licensed. The biblical obsession with idolatry is one symptom of this relentless demand for uncompromising loyalty to God and intolerance of other beliefs and practices. People’s mundane loyalties are divided among one’s family or one’s country or one’s oil company, the argument goes, but loyalty to God, who by definition transcends and exceeds all earthly reali-
ties, must take precedence over all other loyalties, with violence often as the result.

The biblical critique of idolatry seems to break down the binaries between religious and secular, us and them, the clash of civilizations view that fuels violence between the Muslim world and the supposedly secular West. But at the same time, the biblical critique of idolatry seems inseparable from a type of exclusive monotheism that reinforces the boundaries between us and them, the followers of the true God and the worshippers of a false god. If, as I have argued, worship of all kinds can lend itself to violence, does not exclusive worship of one entity—be it God or Mammon, Jesus or the nation—tend more toward violence and exclusiveness?

This is the charge made by scholars such as Jan Assmann and Regina Schwartz. Assmann associates polytheism with an easygoing tolerance that, as he says, is a “theory of the given capable of making people feel totally at home in the world” (GG, 138). Monotheism, on the other hand, with its sharp boundaries of truth vs. untruth and us vs. them, estranges believers from the world, which they see as hostile territory because it falls short of the ideal of truth. The most revolutionary innovation of monotheism, writes Assmann, is that all of life is brought under a unitary principle. What falls short must therefore be cast out; the semantics of conversion and exclusion that accompany monotheism lend themselves to violence, though Assmann is careful to say that this is not an absolutely necessary consequence.

According to Regina Schwartz’s book on monotheism and violence, the problem with monotheism is not just the specific contours of the biblical God of Abraham. The problem is a numeric one: “A stubborn emphasis on oneness asserts itself in preoccupations with purity. Whether as singleness (this God against the others) or totality (this is all the God there is), monotheism abhors, reviles, rejects, and ejects whatever it defines as outside its compass” (63). According to Schwartz, monotheism promises universalism and peace, one God to unite all, but also delivers a particularism so virulent that it reduces all other gods to mere idols, abominations that must be rejected. She writes, “The One suggests both single and All, exclusive and complete. In contrast (and in theory), a genuine universalism would be tolerant of difference, even celebrate it, rather than reject and deny it. But the monotheism that strives for universalism instead of particularism runs another risk. The danger of a universal monotheism is asserting that its truth is the Truth, its system of knowledge the system of knowledge, its ethics the Ethics—not because, as in particularism, any other option must be rejected, but because there is simply no other option” (33). To solve this problem, Schwartz says, we must embrace not
oneness but multiplicity and plenitude. The solution is “not to forge totality, but to endlessly compose and recompose temporary and multiple identifications…Not one, but many gods” (37-8).

Assmann adds more precision to this idea when he claims that oneness, strictly speaking, is not the heart of the issue. Polytheism often embraced a theme of oneness underlying all the different manifestations of the divine. What makes monotheism different is the negation of other gods: “exclusion is the decisive point, not oneness” (PM, 34). In polytheism, the gods are part of the world and determine the political structure of society. Assmann writes, “the decisive factor is not the numerical principle of plurality but the indistinction of the divine from the mundane from which plurality necessarily follows” (PM, 41). It is precisely the monotheistic division of God from the world that unleashes both the creative and the destructive power of the divine, according to Assmann. A transcendent God opens up the possibility that the world could be otherwise; such a God liberates humans from the constraints of this world. At the same time, the absolute divide between the divine and the mundane introduces the absolute divide between truth and falsehood, the one true God and all the false ones, the divide that produces violence.

The Vatican’s International Theological Commission issued a document late last year entitled “God the Trinity, Unity of Humankind” which is subtitled “Christian Monotheism against Violence.” The document attempts to rebut the common charge that monotheism promotes violence. In its first approach to the question, the Commission addresses the numerical issue by arguing that appeals to pluralism and a merely relative truth lead to mutual indifference and hostility. They turn the argument upside down, and argue that violence is more likely when there is no common quest for truth to bring people together. Assmann, however, has already responded to similar arguments made by others that monotheism, because it is universal, is inclusive of the whole human race and therefore tends toward unity. Assmann points out that such arguments do not come from Jewish quarters. Jews, he says, assume that monotheism creates borders around the chosen people who are guardians of the truth about God. Universal worship of the one God awaits the end-time; in the meantime, Jews would not think of coercing others to worship the one God. Christians and Muslims, on the other hand, are universalistic and want to transform the world and convert others now. Precisely for that reason, those who refuse to accept the message are considered outcasts and are readily subjected to coercion.

This is a crude argument as stated, but Assmann has a point: the argument cannot be settled mathematically, that is, by arguing for one or many gods, by arguing for
unity or plurality, by arguing for universality or particularity. Having one God can unify humanity into one brotherhood and sisterhood, but it can also produce intolerance toward those who refuse to be so unified. The real issue is not quantitative but qualitative, not how many gods but which gods one actually worships. Here Assmann’s argument founders, in at least two ways. First, Assmann thinks that biblical monotheism creates absolute exclusions of other gods by the one true God of Abraham. When it comes to named pagan gods this is true, but when it comes to the more common forms of idolatry like greed and political loyalties it is not. As we have seen, these forms of devotion are always on a continuum of more or less, and the biblical God tolerates a lot of ambiguity when it comes to these other forms of devotion. Second, Assmann operates with a substantivist idea of religion as something inherently separate from secular matters. World-transforming universalist projects of transcendence like Christianity and Islam are condemned as prone to violence, while world-transforming universalist projects of transcendence like nationalism, Marxism, capitalism, scientism, and liberalism pass by unnoticed. Are these not also species of monotheism, as Assmann defines it? Are they not universalist projects, organized around some basic Truth about humanity, that promise to unite us all, once the heretics have all been converted or cast out?

The Christian God

Once the playing field has thus been leveled and we accept that the issue is not how many gods, but which gods, are being worshipped, we must still address that question of what kind of god we worship. Assmann seems to think the ancient civic gods avoid the violent potential of the God who transcends the world to change it, but the civic gods are the gods of the status quo. There can be no change without the revolutionary God who promises a new heavens and a new earth. Can we have such a God without violence?

Here the Theological Commission’s document on monotheism and violence is helpful, for they turn away from questions of the quantity of generic gods to the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth. Christians believe that the kind of God that we have is revealed in the torture and death of this man who was also God himself. In the Cross, Jesus absorbs the violence of the world, without giving it back. “In the death of Jesus, in whom the Son himself has suffered the violence of the ‘sin of the world,’ which corrupts every religion and blinds all compassion, is nevertheless hidden – and thereby revealed – the mystery of the ‘salvation of the world’” (45). What appe-
ars to be defeat, in other words, is in fact the transformation of the whole world, not through violence, but through breaking the cycle of violence. Jesus refuses either to abandon the truth revealed to him by his Abba, or to defend that truth with violence. He commands his followers to do the same; take up the cross, not the sword, and follow me.

Near the end of Pope St. John Paul II’s encyclical on truth, Veritatis Splendor, he includes a moving passage on martyrdom. Martyrs are willing to give their lives rather than violate the truth. According to John Paul II, their “witness makes an extraordinarily valuable contribution to warding off…a headlong plunge into the most dangerous crisis which can affect man: the confusion between good and evil” (93). Liberal societies often claim to prefer confusion to death; it is better to avoid martyrdom by eliminating questions of fundamental truth from public discourse, since we won’t agree, and the liberal assumption is that we can’t fundamentally disagree without violence. John Paul II, on the other hand, seems to be saying that sometimes we must disagree, but we can do so without inflicting violence if we follow Jesus Christ and vow to prefer even our own deaths over doing violence to another. If we hold fast to important truths, we cannot assume that we will meet with agreement, but we can refuse to coerce others to agree.

Assmann regards martyrdom as simply the initial form of Christian intolerance that would eventually be directed at others. He writes, “Most officials of the Roman Empire had little interest in creating martyrs and were prepared to grant all manner of concessions to the overly scrupulous, resting satisfied with minimal forms of compliance. Intolerance was far more prevalent among the ranks of their victims, who were inclined to regard the slightest concession on their part as evidence of ‘assimilation’ and as a falling away from god” (PM, 20). Assmann so prefers the gods of the status quo that he is prepared to blame violence on the victims, rather than the perpetrators, of bloody persecution. Because he takes for granted a clear division between religious and secular concerns, he cannot fathom the possibility that Christians might not be able to fit comfortably into a political order that venerates Caesar as a god.

Assmann is not wrong, however, to worry that martyrdom can be rooted in the same attitude of self-righteousness and blindness to others that causes some kinds of violence. Taking up your cross must mean something other than putting up with the fools who disagree with you. Taking up one’s cross must mean a deep sense of penance for one’s own sinfulness. Here we may turn to John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation on Reconciliation and Penance. In that document John Paul II sets
out his vision of a penitential Church, a vision he helped enact through his many gestures of asking forgiveness for the sins of the members of the Church. John Paul II makes clear that there can be no peace, no reconciliation, without penance. And a prerequisite for penance is a “sense of sin,” (18) a sense which the Pope laments has been greatly diminished in our time. He links this sense of sin to the search for truth, but this sense comes from looking within, not first finding sin in others. Indeed, though emphasizing personal sin, John Paul II writes of a “communion of sin” in which the effects of sin are shared throughout the whole human family.

The remedy for sin and violence is the Cross. John Paul II quotes Paul’s letter to the Romans: “If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.” We were reconciled while we were enemies of God. This is the Truth, with a capital T, that we proclaim as Christians. We must not attempt to sort out the friends of God from the enemies of God because we, not someone else, are enemies of God who have nevertheless been made God’s friends. Not just they but we are idolaters, but Christ reconciles us anyway. And the universal Truth is that Christ does so universally; Christ comes to reconcile all humankind. The distinction between friends and enemies is overcome by Christ’s act of taking on the sins of the world.

The reason we should reject violence is not from a prideful conviction that we are the pure in a world full of evil. The gospel call to non-violence comes from the realization that we are not good enough to use violence. Peacemaking requires not so much heroism as a humble restraint in identifying enemies of God, because Jesus Christ has invited us to take up the cross, absorbing the violence of the world and refusing to give it out. That is the kind of God we claim to worship. May those claims be manifested in our lives.
Bios

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About the Centre

The Centre for the Thought of John Paul II is a self-governing cultural institution of the City of Warsaw. Its mission is to research, document and disseminate – in innovative ways - the teaching of John Paul II. Located in the heart of Warsaw, the Centre implements large scale cultural and academic projects. It cooperates with academics and universities, NGOs and other institutions in Poland and abroad.

The Centre directs a range of research projects and organizes international conferences, debates and summer schools inspired by the thought of John Paul II. Members of the Centre’s research institute collaborate with a growing network of expert scholars who identify and explore key questions from a range of perspectives, including philosophy, theology, social and political sciences or other disciplines.

The Centre boasts an exceptionally rich library collection consisting of books as well media and audiovisual materials, including 356 interviews which shed light on the person and impact of John Paul II. The Centre organizes two academic conferences monthly and five weekly seminars for students. Furthermore, the Centre has its own choir and regularly hosts artistic and cultural events that are open to the public. Its annual festival of theatre and arts, “Gorzkie Żale” (“Lenten Lamentations”), is well known amongst actors, artists and literary critics.

During the past year, the Centre launched a new international project, “The Treasure of Solidarity”, through which it has hosted numerous academic seminars exploring the spiritual roots of Solidarity. Under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Poland, the Centre in 2013 also organized Warsaw’s first “Courtyard of Dialogue” (“Dziedziniec Dialogu”) comprising four high-level public debates concerning the issues of faith, culture, society, and science.

Additionally, the Centre manages the official scholarship programme of the City of Warsaw, distributing scholarship funds of nearly 2.5 mln PLN annually to over 500 pupils and students studying in the City. The Centre has its own online television station, Foksal Eleven, which broadcasts cultural and social programmes and ensures online streaming of events. Finally, the Centre has also published over 40 different publications on topics related to the life, thought and legacy of John Paul II.

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