



Spiritualities of Peace

**Exploring the Spiritual Foundations
of
Religious Peacebuilders**

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1. Introduction

The destructive potential of religion, specifically as it is manifested in religiously motivated violence has been the object of increased interest - in general but also in academic studies (Juergensmeyer 2003, Appleby 2000, Kimbal 2002, Lincoln 2003). On the other hand, the study of religious peacebuilding, the question if and how religion can contribute to peace, is a relatively new field. Here, the potential for peace in religions is taken seriously and explored, specifically elements or processes such as empathy and compassion, apology and forgiveness, and social justice (Smock 2006: 1).

But let's first return to religious violence: In his work on religious terrorism, Mark Juergensmeyer (2002) examines individuals who perpetrated terrorist acts based on religious motivations. He identifies common characteristics of religious terrorists across religious divides:

- The own religion is taken seriously
- A sense of injustice against the own group (ethnic, political, religious) resulting in a struggle to overcome this injustice
- There is an metaphysical dualism, which can be described as 'cosmic war' between forces of good and forces of evil
- This cosmic war is reflected in the world in struggles of the good ones and the evil ones. The own group is identified with the forces of good, the enemy with the forces of evil which results in 'satanization' of the enemy
- Evil cannot be redeemed but has to be destroyed. This justifies violence towards enemies.

What is interesting to note is that religious peacebuilders share the first two characteristics: they too are rooted in and committed to their own religious tradition; and they are deeply concerned about injustice and oppression against the own group. Yet, they opt not to use or support violence in their respective struggles but oppose it.

Two questions have come up for me from these findings: **Firstly, could it be that – just like with religious violent actors – there are fundamental commonalities among religious peacebuilders across the different religious traditions? What is the nature of these commonalities?**¹ **And related to this:**

¹ My interest and the questions have been informed by the short but very interesting article by Sharon Nepstad who has identified three differences between religious peacebuilders and violent religious actors: Firstly, whereas violent religious actors locate good within the own group and evil within the enemy group, religious peacebuilders insist that there is good and evil in every person and in every group. Secondly, while violent religious actors see themselves as truth owners, religious peacebuilders have a self-image as truth seekers. And thirdly, while for violent religious actors religion is an end in itself, religious peacebuilders see religion as a means to an end (Nepstad 2004). I am in agreement with Nepstad's analysis, but want to explore this further into the area of spirituality.

When there are basic commonalities between religious violent actors and religious peacebuilders, where do they part ways? Why does religious dedication and a sense of oppression on the one hand result in religious violence and on the other in a rejection of violence? And secondly, by finding (tentative) answers to this first question, what can we learn about how religious actors can contribute to peace?

The five religious peacebuilders have been selected for the following reasons: Both Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King jr. have been foundational in terms of the development of nonviolence in practice and theory. Both are rooted in their respective religious traditions, Gandhi as Hindu, King as Christian. Abdul Ghaffar Khan was a contemporary of Gandhi's and although he was later strongly influenced by Gandhi, he developed his own nonviolence in the face of British domination on the basis of his faith, Islam. Thich Nhat Hanh is a Buddhist monk who has worked for peace during two wars in Vietnam and who has been instrumental in the development of an engaged Buddhist Peace movement. Finally, Archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu has been included because of his role in peacebuilding in South Africa.²

2. Spirituality

There are three questions in connection with the use of the term spirituality that need to be clarified.

2.1 Why spirituality?

Why have I not chosen to examine the beliefs or theologies of the peacebuilders? Why is the term spirituality here used? I am interested in the connection of the motivation, the values, the world view, the foundations of the peacebuilders and how this relates to their respective life witnesses. The term 'belief' doesn't seem to be appropriate here since the life connection is not implied. For example, as the social psychologist Erich Fromm has pointed out, a person can have a belief like a possession which is alienated from and incongruent with personal experience (Fromm 1976: 49f). The term spirituality seems to be broader, encompassing the 'lived-life' or experiential aspect of faith (Kourie & Ruthenberg 2008: 77). In fact, the concept seems to have a certain inherent resistance to being defined and there is no widely accepted consensus on a definition (Lombard 2008: 95). Often in the past – and sometimes now – it is understood as the interior life of a person and the practices that sustain it (MacQueen 1999: 351). This definition, however, may imply a static understanding of spirituality as the interior life in isolation from the external life. In this study, therefore, my focus is on spirituality as the *interior life as it relates to and informs the external life*. My interest is the *link*

² I am aware that there is no woman and no representative of the Jewish faith among the selected peacebuilders. This is not done on purpose. Any suggestions to fill these gaps are most welcome. In the case of gender, this may reflect the widely persistent patriarchal social structures which still make it difficult for women to get into leadership positions in religion and politics.

between the interior and the exterior, between the motivation, foundation, values, or world view of the respective peacebuilders and their peace activism.

2.2 What kind of spirituality?

The term spirituality is closely linked to the Christian tradition, but it is nowadays used in other religious traditions as well, and even beyond the parameters of (institutionalized) religion. It can refer to shared spiritual expressions of a religious tradition or subsections of these traditions, like denominations, sects, schools, etc. (Smit 1989: 86). Yet, I am not looking at spirituality on either of these levels. The peacebuilders come from different religious (and – in the case of Tutu and King – denominational) traditions. Acknowledging this, I am not analyzing the spiritualities of the respective peacebuilders in their totality, but I will focus on those common aspects that transcend their specific religious traditions.

Can we identify characteristics of an spirituality of peace across or beyond closely defined religious parameters?

2.3 Can spirituality be analyzed?

There is a challenge to this endeavor that still needs to be discussed: Other than the shared spiritual expressions of religions or subsections of these religions, personal, individual spirituality has to do with the interior of a person and is therefore largely concealed to the outside (Smit 1989:86), and even to a greater or lesser degree to the person her- or himself. It is thus impossible to fully uncover, analyse, and portray spirituality in this sense as an object of scholarly work. Yet, since there is a connection between the interior and the outward life, we may get some insights into the spirituality and draw some conclusions by looking at both, the life witness and the conceptualizations or beliefs of the respective peacebuilders. The image of a tree may be helpful. What I can see are the parts of the tree that are above the earth. And yet, from what I see I can draw conclusions about the roots, the parts underneath the earth, which are instrumental in sustaining the tree.

3. Religious peacebuilders

3.1 Peacebuilding

In the discipline of peace studies, there are differentiations of concepts: Whereas peacekeeping involves military intervention by third parties trying to contain or prevent direct violence; and peacemaking refers to the diplomatic or political level, peacebuilding is a more comprehensive term, including work for peace on grassroots level (between people and communities). The focus of peacebuilding is the social, economic and psychological environments of ordinary people (Harris & Lewis 1999: 34).

Peacebuilding is thus aiming not just at ‘negative peace’ as the absence of war or direct violence. Instead, its aim is ‘positive peace’ a concept that refers to the “presence of structures which provide increasing degrees of political liberty and social justice for ordinary people” (Harris & Lewis 1999: 32).

In looking at the individuals in this study, I am referring to them as peacebuilders, since their commitment was (and is) to a comprehensive, positive peace with a specific concern for ‘ordinary people’.

3.2 Religious Peacebuilding

Religious Peacebuilding is a relatively new focus of academic studies. Here, the religious motivation of peacebuilders and the explicit use of religion in peacebuilding are taken seriously. Douglas Johnston (cited in Smock 2006: 2) points out the significance of religion in many societies and the potential of religious leaders to facilitate peace. He also identifies the opportunities of specific attributes of religious leaders, such as credibility, a respected set of values, moral warrants for opposing injustice, resources for reconciliation, a capability to mobilize locally. The five individuals in this study have actualized this religious potential for peacebuilding.

3.3 Five Religious Peacebuilders

Before looking at common aspects of their respective spiritualities in more detail, I will now briefly introduce the selected religious peacebuilders.

3.3.1 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi

Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) has been credited with having played an immense part in the liberation of India from British colonialism. After his childhood and youth in India, his legal studies in London, and a short period back in India, Gandhi came to South Africa in 1893. Personal experience of discrimination and his openness to the suffering of others led to the development of nonviolent resistance to oppressive laws. He called this method *satyagraha*, literally a combination of the words truth and force or power. After his return to India in 1915, he devoted himself to the liberation of India and applied *satyagraha* in various campaigns. He founded different ashrams, where *satyagrahis* were trained. He was jailed several times, but this did not stop or break him. India became independent in 1947. At that time tensions between Hindus and Muslims ran high and many people were killed on both sides. Gandhi was a supporter of Hindu-Muslim unity and worked for peace and reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims. 1948 he was killed by an extremist Hindu.

3.3.2 Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan

Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was a contemporary of M.K. Gandhi and was greatly influenced by him. However, his commitment to nonviolence developed prior to

his encounter with Gandhi and on the basis of his own understanding and re-interpretation of his religious tradition, Islam. Khan was born 1890 in Utmanzai, a village near Peshawar of the Northwest Frontier Province which today is part of Pakistan. Khan attended a mission school and was impressed by the British principal's dedication to the Pathan people (Easwaran 1999: 64). This influenced Khan to serve his own people which he did by building the first non-British schools in the region and engaging in social reform. He developed his own nonviolence in the context of the Pathan code of revenge, which he saw as primary obstacle for development. Subsequently, he extended the method of nonviolence to the fight against British colonialism and in the process founded a nonviolent army, the Khudai Kidmatgars (Servants of God), with a membership of up to 100 000 who resisted British oppression and violence unarmed, taking an oath which included to serve humanity; to refrain from violence and taking revenge; to forgive those who oppressed them and treated them with cruelty (Johansen 1997: 59). After the independence of Pakistan, he fought for the rights of the Pathan people. In his life he spent a total of 30 years in prison and 7 years in exile. He died in 1988.

3.3.3 Martin Luther King jr

Martin Luther King jr. was born a son of a Baptist preacher in 1929. He studied theology and received a PhD in 1955. He became a Baptist minister in Montgomery, Alabama. He became a leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott against racial segregation and was founding member and first president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. As the principal leader of the civil rights movement in the USA he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964. He was assassinated in 1968. He has been credited with developing the concept of nonviolence as method of active resistance against injustice and as life style within the framework of the Christian faith.

3.3.4 Thich Nhat Hanh

Thich Nhat Hanh was born 1926 in Vietnam. At the age of 16 years he entered a Buddhist monastery. He experienced the French-Indochine War as well as the Vietnam War. As a consequence of these experiences, he founded the School for Youth in Social Service, an organization that provided relief for victims of war. He was also one of the initiators of the Engaged Buddhism movement (Nhat Hanh 2003: 94). In the 1960ies he studied and lectured in the USA, but mainly got involved in efforts to end the Vietnam War. In 1967 he was nominated by Martin Luther King jr. for the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1969 he was part of the Buddhist Peace Delegation at the Paris Peace talks. He was refused to return to both North and South Vietnam and ever since lives in exile in France, where he founded a Buddhist community.

3.3.5 Desmond Tutu

Archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu (born 1931) is probably the most well-known South African after Nelson Mandela. Growing up as a child of a teacher and a domestic worker, he became a teacher himself, before studying theology, both in

South Africa and in England to become a priest in the Anglican church. In his career he served as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, Bishop of Johannesburg and became the first black Anglican Archbishop of South Africa. In 1984 he received the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition and support of his principled stance and work against apartheid. In the mid to late 1990s he chaired South Africa's major project in nationbuilding, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

4. Common Threads

As indicated above, there are some aspects that religious peacebuilders have in common with violent religious actors. We can observe a common concern about perceived injustice; the concern about the 'own' group (religious, ethnic, class, nation, etc.) as well as a strong commitment to their religion.

So where are the commonalities among the examined religious peacebuilders; and where are the differences between the violent religious actors and the religious peacebuilders?

4.1 Exterior Life

I will start by identifying a number of common aspects of what is 'visible', the ethical effects or consequences of spirituality. In a second step, I will then try to trace these exterior aspects to the realm of the interior, the spirituality.

4.1.1 Against Injustice

All the peacebuilders have been involved in struggles against injustice, as the violation of their people's dignity and human rights. For Gandhi and Khan the primary struggles were against colonialism, for King and Tutu racism; and for Nhat Hanh the violence of two wars. And while they were and remained committed to their respective primary struggles, they all at some or other stage extended their focus beyond the 'own group' and the 'own experience' of injustice.

Gandhi engaged in a fierce struggle against the oppression inherent in the caste system with the oppression of the so-called untouchables (Easwaran 1978: 56). He criticized sexism but saw it as vital that women would take the lead in freeing themselves (King 1999: 330-331). Committed to the brotherhood of all religions, he also strongly opposed any religious domination and specifically worked for peace between Hindus and Muslims when India was at the verge of religiously motivated civil war (Easwaran 1978: 88).

Similarly, Khan advocated religious harmony and refused to join the Muslim League in their call against what they called 'Hindu rule' (Easwaran 1999: 166).

He also spoke out strongly against the domination of women. It is even more striking that, in the context of a deeply patriarchal Muslim tradition, he based this criticism on his understanding of the Koran (Johansen 1997: 61). And more generally, advising his followers, Khan said: “You have to be against all tyrants, whoever they may be, whether individuals or nations... you will oppose them” (Easwaran 1999:199).

King extended his fight for civil rights of African-Americans in the south of the USA to the fight against economic exploitation in the north as he came to see racial injustice and economic injustice as ‘inseparable twins’ (King 1990: 150). Still later, and against much resistance even from within the civil rights movement (for pragmatic reasons) he developed a strong stance against militarism, and specifically the Vietnam war (Lee 2006: 132). Summing up his conviction he says: “God is not interested in merely freeing black men and brown men and yellow men; God is interested in freeing the whole human race” (King 1999:342).

Nhat Hanh emphasized the continuum of peace, with the importance of inner peace being connected to outer peace. His writings portray a global perspective with an emphasis on the need for personal growth and development towards peace, but linking this to broader issues of overcoming war/militarism, economic and environmental injustice. A religious community should take a clear but non-partisan stand against oppression and injustice (Nhat Hanh 1987: 49). Referring to the Buddha and Jesus, he supports gender equality in terms of leadership roles in religious communities (Nhat Hanh 2007: 71).

Tutu linked his struggle against apartheid increasingly with struggles against other forms of discrimination. He came to argue that just as racial discrimination is based on a biological feature which is unchangeable and irrelevant, so it is the case with sexism and heterosexism. He was instrumental in introducing the ordination of women priests in the Anglican church in South Africa (Allen 2006: 280) and is one of the world’s most prominent religious leaders who openly support the cause of gays and lesbians (Allen 2006: 372). Recently, he has also become vocal on environmental justice

(<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=172>; <http://planetark.org/ark/50697>; http://www.environment.co.za/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=1877).

Disappointed with the new democratic government in South Africa, Tutu stated: “I have struggled against tyranny. I didn’t do that in order to substitute another. If there is tyranny and abuse of power, let them know I will fight it” (Allen 2006: 367).

We can thus see that they all developed from being engaged with their own struggles for justice to engaging in other struggles and ultimately to reject domination, injustice, oppression as such – in its various manifestations³.

³ The work of the cultural historian Riane Eisler is relevant in this regard. Analyzing cultures throughout human history, she systematized her findings in the conceptual framework of

4.1.2 For Positive Peace

The fight against injustice, however, is only one side of the coin. The other is the positive goal that the peacebuilders were striving towards. This goal would include social justice, development, democracy and human rights. But it also goes beyond the structural level. The ultimate goal is transformed human relationships.

For Gandhi, at least as important as active nonviolence in the face of injustice was the so-called ‘constructive programme’, a comprehensive national strategy which included the uplifting of the poor through development of economic self-reliance, the cultivation of self-esteem among Indian people, and moral behavior (Parekh 2001: 11). Beyond Indian independence, Gandhi envisioned what he called *sarvodaya*, the good society (King 1999: 260) in which individuals have access to their community’s resources (understood in a broad sense) in order to actualize their potential (Parekh 2001:117).

Khan’s initial motivation for his activism was the desire for his people to escape underdevelopment, poverty and violence. His goal was that every community should have equal opportunities (Easwaran 1999: 181). Among the objectives of

‘domination’ and ‘partnership’ models of social structures (Eisler 1995). She describes the domination model as follows (Eisler 2000: 11):

- authoritarian structure with hierarchies of domination
- Ranking of males over females
- Institutionalization of fear, violence and abuse
- High social investment in stereotypically “masculine” traits and activities such as control and conquest of people and nature
- Myths and stories honoring and sacralizing domination

As alternative to the domination model, the partnership model is characterized by:

- Egalitarian structure with hierarchies of actualization
- Equal valuing of females and males
- Institutionalization of mutual honoring, respect and peaceful conflict resolution
- High social investment in stereotypically “feminine” traits such as empathy, caring, nonviolence and caretaking
- Myth and stories honoring and sacralizing partnership

In her book *The Chalice and the Blade* (Eisler 1995) she highlights what several of the religious peacebuilders have touched on: the oppression of women as basic element of the domination model. From her feminist perspective she links various forms of domination, from the private to the political.

In a book on the practical application of the partnership model, she gives advice on how to live the partnership model in seven relationship areas: the relationship to ourselves, intimate relations, work and community relationships, relationship with the national community, relationship with the international community, relationship with nature, and spiritual relations (Eisler 2002). Against a privatistic pre-occupation with self-actualization she insists that “just working on ourselves is not enough”. Instead she emphasizes the importance of “the road from the self to society and back again ... to change cultural beliefs and social structures that imprison us in a life we don’t want” (Eisler 2002: xix). This is what she calls a ‘partnership spiritual path’.

the Khudai Kidmatgars were tolerance, freedom from bondage for all people as well as reconciliation of diverse creeds, ethnicities, and races (Johansen 1997: 67).

King called his envisioned goal the ‘beloved community’, a community at peace with itself (King 1999: 277), “in which all men (sic) will live together as brothers (sic) and respect the dignity and worth of human personality” (King 1999: 342). The peace he was envisaging for this community was “not merely the absence of some negative force – war, tension, confusion – but it is the presence of some positive force – justice, goodwill, the power of the kingdom of God” (King 1999:279). Therefore he rejected narrow loyalties: “Our loyalties must transcend our race, tribe, class, nation” (King 1999: 334).

Coming from his specific experience of two wars in Vietnam, Nhat Hanh has started to teach peace practices in exile, in the community he established in France. These trainings are open for anyone, but include people from antagonistic groups, such as Palestinians and Israelis (Nhat Hanh 2003: 185). He understands peace as “not simply the absence of violence; it is the cultivation of understanding, insight, and compassion, combined with action” (Nhat Hanh 2003: 5). It means protecting life in general which includes working for social justice (Nhat Hanh 1987: 54).

As his leadership of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission exemplified, Tutu places a high emphasis on reconciliation between enemies and the restoration of relationships as in the process of restorative justice (over mere punitive justice) where “the central concern is not retribution or punishment but, in the spirit of *ubuntu*, the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships. This kind of justice seeks to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he or she has injured by his or her offence” (Allen 2006: 347).

Taking the immediate causes and struggles for justice seriously, the peacebuilders have transcended these boundaries to include all humanity (and nature) in the envisioned goal of a peace that includes social justice, but also improved human relationships, as restored and reconciled community is essential for all religious peacebuilders.

4.1.3 Engaging Opponents

As opposed to violent religious actors, who appear to locate good with the own group and evil within an out-group, religious peacebuilders see good and evil in every person and in every group (Nepstad 2004: 298). The struggle is against forces or structures that are unjust or evil, not against individuals or groups who are capable of change. The peacebuilders therefore engage in developing

compassion and empathy with others in general and with opponents or enemies in specific. Their aim is not to win over their opponents (win-lose) but to win them over (win-win).

Gandhi developed his concept of nonviolence comprehensively. True nonviolence meant to think, speak, and act nonviolently (King 1999: 235). He hated oppression but not the oppressor (King 1999: 239) and sought to conquer opponents with love (King 1999: 255). He saw evil in systems of exploitation and domination, but refused to see human beings as evil (Easwaran 1978: 56). Rather, he thought of human beings as capable for change and with the inherent capacity for actualizing the good in them (Parekh 2001: 62).

Khan developed an uncompromising and strict commitment to nonviolence as a way of life, based on his understanding of the Koran (Johansen 1997: 60). Referring to an incident when he was challenged by a fellow Muslim, Khan recalls: "I cited chapter and verse from the Koran to show the great emphasis that Islam has laid on peace [...]. I also showed to him how the greatest figures in Islamic history were known more for their forbearance and self-restraint than their fierceness" (Pal 2002: 24). Elsewhere he stated: "There is nothing surprising in a Muslim or a Pathan like me subscribing to the creed of nonviolence. It is not a new creed. It was followed fourteen hundred years ago by the Prophet all the time he was in Mecca, and it has since been followed by all those who wanted to throw off an oppressor's yoke" (Easwaran 1999: 103). And in even stronger language he linked nonviolence to Muslim identity: "The Holy Prophet Mohammed came into this world and taught us: 'That man is a Muslim who never hurts anyone by word or deed, but who works for the benefit and happiness of God's creatures. Belief in God is to love one's fellowmen'" (Easwaran 1999: 55).

King rejected demonisation as well as idealization of people. He believed that "there is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us" (King 1990: 49). To follow Christ in his command of loving one's enemies therefore means to discover the goodness in the enemy and to see that the enemy's hate "grows out of fear, pride, ignorance, prejudice, and misunderstanding" (ibid). Such an attitude towards the enemy ultimately rests on the conviction that "God's image is ineffably etched in his (sic) being" (ibid) and that nobody is beyond the reach of God's redemptive love.

For the question of good and evil Nhat Hanh uses an image: All people have seeds of peace and seeds of violence within themselves. What is important is 'selective watering': the seeds of peace need to be watered, but not the seeds of violence (Nhat Hanh 2003: 132). The practice of mindfulness is the essential aspect of watering the seeds of peace. Specifically, he teaches the necessity to develop empathy and compassion. During the first war between the USA and Iraq, he reveals that he practiced empathizing with President Bush and Saddam Hussein. He says that in his practice "I was one with President Bush, I was one with Saddam Hussein. I did not see him as enemy. I had been angry with

President Bush, of course, but after having practiced breathing in and out, I saw myself as President Bush” (Nhat Hanh 2004: 150-151). Deep listening and empathizing with the people we think of as enemies is the practice of peace (Nhat Hanh 2004: 153). He attributes violence to ignorance on a deeper level, not seeing that violence always is violence to oneself (Nhat Hanh 2001 :133-134). He insists that violent people need to be helped, not punished (Nhat Hanh 2007: 110)

Tutu’s conviction is that enemies are potential allies, friends, colleagues and collaborators (Tutu 1999: 227). This is manifested in his repeated attempts to appeal to the apartheid president PW Botha. Even when this seemed to be futile he insisted: “... I must desire and pray for the best in him” (Allen 2006: 267). When Botha’s wife passed away, Tutu attended the funeral – which was incomprehensible to and criticized by many ... (???) . He believed that whites were not inhuman, but scared (Allen 2006: 239). During the Truth and Reconciliation Commission he held fast to his conviction that because God is fundamentally a God of grace, nobody is an “irredeemable cause devoid of all hope” (Tutu 1999: 75). Human beings can change and be redeemed because they are not identical with their actions, there is a distinction between the perpetrator and the deed, between the sinner and the sin (Tutu 1999: 73).

The common picture that emerges is that the peacebuilders did not see their opponents as evil or incapable of changing. Rather than evil, the peacebuilders see them as blind, ignorant or scared, and therefore in need of help. And since there is evil and good in every person, change and transformation by means of dialogue, persuasion, appeal to their humanity are possible.

4.1.4 Religion: rooted yet open

Violent religious actors are rooted in their respective religious tradition. They see their religion’s truth claims as absolute and in opposition to other religions. In which ways differ religious peacebuilders from such positions and attitudes?

Gandhi was rooted in Hinduism and especially loved the *Bhagavadgita*. Yet he also had very high regard for the Koran and the New Testament (specifically the Sermon on the Mount) which were recited along with the *Bhagavadgita* at evening prayers (Easwaran 1978: 137). It can be said that with his eclecticism, specifically the Christian concept of redemptive suffering, Gandhi had a profound effect on Hinduism (Parekh?). He strongly objected against the idea of religious domination and, during the religious violence in India in the 1940ies he worked tirelessly for peace among Hindus and Muslims.

Khan was a devout Muslim. Yet, he remarkably re-interpreted and developed parts of his religious tradition: He emphasized the Islamic concept of *sabr* which can be translated as tenacity in a righteous cause, cheerful resignation in

misfortune, forgiveness, self-control, renunciation and refraining from revenge (Anon. without date: 3) and *amal, yakeen, muhabat* which can be translated as selfless service, faith and love (Easwaran 1999: 13) and thereby focused on aspects that were leading to a principled nonviolence (Johansen 1997: 66). He was also tolerant towards other religions. For him all faiths contain sufficient inspiration for their adherents and he insisted that Hindus are also ‘people of the book’ and as such should be treated with respect by Muslims (Anon. without date: 6)

King describes his faith journey as ‘pilgrimage to nonviolence’ (King 1990: 147-155) which led him through various stages but resulted in a strengthened faith “that has been validated in the experiences of everyday life” (King 1990: 154). He came to see love as supreme unifying principle of life in all great religions (King 1999: 263).

The first precept of Nhat Hanh’s Tiep Hien Order states that no doctrine should be absolutized, not even Buddhist ones, since this leads to ending the process of inquiry and enlightenment (Nhat Hanh 1987: 27). Violence and suffering are the result of people clinging too tightly to their own beliefs and ideologies (Nhat Hanh 2007: 2). Instead, what is important is “our insight into the nature of reality and our way of responding to reality” (Nhat Hanh 2007: 55). Dogmas are not essential; love and compassion must be manifested in the way we live (Nhat Hanh 2007: 57). Teachings must be practiced (Nhat Hanh 2007: 70). Consequently, Nhat Hanh is open to truths outside his own tradition. His appreciative dialogue with Christianity is manifested in his book *Living Buddha, living Christ* (Nhat Hanh 2007).

Nhat Hanh implicitly challenged the non-political, solely interior-focused Buddhism by co-founding the Engaged Buddhism movement (Nhat Hanh 2003: 94).

Tutu holds on to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Yet, he sees something of the ‘divine splendor’ in other faiths as well (Lubbe 1996: 244). Claiming that he has “encountered holiness, spiritual insight and the presence of God in people of many different religions”, he insists that “[i]t is not for us to decide who God is and where this God is to be found” (Villa-Vicencio 1996: 45-46). He is convinced that justice and peace transcend faith boundaries (Allen 2006: 396).

The common image that emerges is that the selected peacebuilders are all rooted in their own religious tradition and take this tradition seriously. And yet, they are open to other religions and truths. Moreover, the peacebuilders have also challenged, influenced and developed their own tradition in new directions.

4.1.5 A Non-dualistic worldview

All the aspects that have been examined thus far can be understood as a consequence of a non-dualistic understanding of reality.

Gandhi says: “All of us are one. When you inflict suffering on others, you are bringing suffering on yourself” (Easwaran 1978: 56). In mystical language he states that “we are in all people and they are in us” (King 1999: 240) and that he feels kinship with all life (King 1999: 337).

Khan didn't put in into words, but his life is testimony to the fact that he did not see people in antagonistic terms but strove to transcend boundaries.

King said: “All life is interrelated and all men (sic) are interdependent” (King 1999: 341). And he elaborated on this poetically: “All men (sic) are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality” (King 1990: 70).

Nhat Hanh's basic assumption is that of the interrelatedness of all life (Nhat Hanh 2006: 50).

Interpreting his understanding of the African notion of *ubuntu*, Tutu states: “Our humanity is caught up in that of all others. We are human because we belong. We are made for community, for togetherness, for family, to exist in a delicate network of interdependence” (Tutu 1999: 154).

We can thus see the centrality of interdependence, the essential unity of humankind (and nature). When reality is fundamentally interconnected and interdependent, when humans are basically one, linked to each other, then this has several consequences/ implications:

- a sense of connection to others or life in general, including opponents
- a focus on reconciliation, restoration of relationships
- compassion and empathy with others, specifically the suffering
- struggle against any form of domination as preventing the actualization of inherent potential of human beings (or life in general)
- active engagement for a comprehensive, communal, just peace

In a second step we are now asking if this non-dualistic worldview can be traced back to the interior, the spirituality of the religious peacebuilders.

4.2 Interior Life

In a second step I want to explore the interior life of the religious peacebuilders and see whether there are aspects that can be seen as informing the non-dualistic worldview of the peacebuilders.

4.2.1 A Benevolent Ultimate

Gandhi's foundation was his belief in a Benevolent Ultimate. And although he often used the term 'God', he was against a personification of the Ultimate and conceived of it rather as cosmic spirit, which was pure, rational, active, all-pervasive, benevolent, pre-existent, infinitely loving and infinitely powerful, creating and imposing universal laws (Parekh 2001: 36-37). Linking his belief in the Benevolent Ultimate with his anthropology, Gandhi proclaims: "I believe in absolute oneness of God and, therefore, also of humanity" (King 1999: 338).

There is little known about how Khan experienced his God other than that he was a devout Muslim. He stated that he had "only one standard of measure and that is the measure of one's surrender to God" (Easwaran 1999: 131). That he practiced this surrender has been witnessed widely.

In King's account of his pilgrimage to nonviolence, he describes how the idea of a personal God has become real for him, beyond a metaphysical category. He states his conviction that the universe is under the control of a loving purpose and that behind the harsh appearances of the world, there is a benign power (King 1990: 154).

Nhat Hanh speaks of the 'ultimate dimension'. It is not so important for him, how this dimension is called and he doesn't have a problem calling it Nirvana, God, Allah, etc. What is important is to be in touch with this ultimate dimension which results in the awareness of the interconnectedness of all beings (Nhat Hanh 2006: 50-52).

Tutu's belief in a benevolent and just supreme God was shaped during apartheid times. In the tradition of the Old Testament prophets he would say: "This is a moral universe – the upholders of apartheid have already lost". And jokingly he would invite apartheid supporters: "We are being nice to you. Join the winning side" (Tutu 1999: 77). This exemplifies his deep conviction of a God who is in charge and who will manifest justice.

We see that the Ultimate reality for the religious peacebuilders is one that is benevolent, moral in the sense of bending towards justice, and in charge and can therefore be trusted. How has this relationship with the Benevolent Ultimate been embodied concretely?

4.2.2 Prayer and Meditation

Gandhi developed a daily routine of getting up at 3 or 4am for meditation and prayer which was the most essential part of his day, since it gave him the energy and strength he needed for his work (Easwaran 1978:130). In daily evening prayers of the ashram, parts of the Koran, the Sermon on the Mount and the Bhagavadgita were recited (ibid: 137). He claimed that he had overcome hatred by “a long course of prayerful discipline” (ibid: 56).

Of the little that is available about Khan’s prayer life, it is significant that as a young man during a crucial time of discernment he held an individual fast in a small room in a Mosque for several days. During this fast he appears to have had a mystical experience: “Islam! Inside him, the word began to explode with meaning. Islam! Submit! Surrender to the Lord and know His strength! Ghaffar felt swelling within him the desire to serve this great God. And since He needed no service, Ghaffar would serve His creatures instead – the tattered villagers who were too ignorant and too steeped in violence to help themselves” (Easwaran 1999: 71). This experience is also characteristic of Khan’s “strong sense of confidence in his own ability, through study, meditation, prayer, to find the most faithful path for him and others who might follow his lead” (Korejo, quoted in Abu-Nimer 2003: 88f).

King was once asked how he was able to forgive the person who attempted to murder him with a knife. He responded: “Throughout this struggle for racial justice, I have constantly asked God to remove all bitterness from my heart and to give me strength and courage to face any disaster that came my way. This constant prayer life and feeling of dependence on God have given me the feeling that I have divine companionship in the struggle. I know of no other way to explain it. It is the fact that in the midst of external tension, God can give an inner peace” (Long 2004: 87).

Although Buddhism knows no concept of God, Nhat Hanh uses the concept of prayer to describe the importance of connecting to the ‘ultimate dimension’ (Nhat Hanh 2006: 52). Since the person is in the Buddha and the Buddha in the person, the Buddhist is praying to the Buddha and to her- or himself; there is no distinction (Nhat Hanh 2006: 31). For Nhat Hanh prayer needs to be practical, accompanied by action. “In prayer there has to be mindfulness, concentration, insight, loving kindness, and compassion. . . We have to pray with our body, speech, and mind and with our daily life” (Nhat Hanh 2006:40-41). Central to Nhat Hanh’s spirituality is the notion of ‘mindfulness’. Being mindful means acting with awareness in the present moment, paying full attention to whatever one is doing. As tools to assist in this practice of being mindful in the here and now he suggests breathing and walking meditation. The result of mindfulness is a depth of understanding reality. For example, when eating a bread mindfully, one sees the grain, the sun and the farmer in the bread (Nhat Hanh ?). Mindfulness is therefore the door to greater understanding of reality and to the

practice of love and compassion: “In Buddhism, religious practice begins with mindfulness. As the practice deepens and mindfulness becomes more sustained, the practitioner is able to touch, feel, see, and understand more deeply. Understanding makes love and compassion possible, and when love and compassion are present, understanding deepens” (Nhat Hanh 2007: 180). The practice of mindfulness starts within the individual but extends to others, society, and nature. Against a possible criticism of escapism he asserts: “If we are not aware of suffering in the world, we are not practicing mindfulness” (Nhat Hanh 2007: 83).

Nhat Hanh’s own practice of mindfulness is witnessed by a person who interviewed him: “The first thing that you notice about Thich Nhat Hanh is that he walks really, really slowly. He also speaks very deliberately. And when he wants a sip of tea, he stops speaking, breathes in and out, takes a drink, lowers his cup, breathes again, and continues” (Schlumpf 2003: 18).

For Tutu, prayer is central to his life. He has felt a constant pull towards silence and prayer (Allen 2006: 394), regularly spent quiet days, an annual long retreat and many hours in prayer daily (Cull 1996: 32). His biographer explains that “Tutu the ebullient extrovert and Tutu the meditative priest who needed six or seven hours a day in silence were two sides of the same coin. One could not exist without the other: in particular, his extraordinary capacity to communicate with warmth, compassion, and humor depended on the regeneration of personal resources, which in turn depended on the iron self-discipline of his prayers” (Allen 2006: 275).

His confessor and spiritual director Francis Cull describes Tutu’s spirituality with the words of contemplation (as opposed to other-worldly oriented pietism) and action (as opposed to activism). “The contemplative – and Desmond Tutu’s prayer has become more and more contemplative over the years – finds its source of strength in his or her God and longs to take this experience out into the world” (Cull 1996: 33). Cull sees Tutu’s prayer informing his work; and his work being an expression of his prayer. Specifically, Cull sees Tutu’s capacity for compassion and advocacy for the marginalized rooted in the awareness of the compassionate, suffering God (Cull 1996: 33). A logic consequence of the centrality of prayer for Tutu and his great concern to “get people praying again” (Cull 1996: 34) was his instrumental role in the foundation of an Institute for Christian Spirituality (Allen 2006: 276).

What we can see is that the peacebuilders have experienced their relationship with the Benevolent Ultimate as one that needs to be nurtured with the practice of prayer and meditation to which they committed considerable time and energy. We may also conclude that the nature of this close connection to the Ultimate resulted in the freedom of the peacebuilders’ action: the freedom to challenge various forms of domination, including their own tradition or institutional religion. And on the other hand the freedom to engage with other people and groups, be it religious traditions, ethnic, political, national groups.

4.2.3 Self-Awareness and Personal Growth

The religious peacebuilders appear to have had a close link between prayer and meditation on the one hand, and self-examination and personal growth on the other.

The mature Gandhi repeatedly mentions that his achievements are due to a constant practice and self-examination. He often refers to having “cultivated” his nonviolent attitude or life-style. As the subtitle of his autobiography suggests, he experimented a lot in his life, drawing conclusions from failures and learning from them. The search for truth was paramount for him. He saw himself as a ‘truth seeker’ but not a ‘truth owner’ since he confessed that he had not yet found truth (Gandhi 1983: ix). He described himself as a “poor, struggling soul, yearning to be wholly good, wholly truthful and wholly non-violent in thought, word and deed, but ever failing to reach the ideal” (King 1999: 207).

Khan came to see nonviolence not merely as a method, but as a way of life. Desai (Johansen 1997: 61) sees Khan’s life as one sustained effort for self-purification, which may be interpreted as a constant practice in overcoming violence within himself. When reflecting on his own personal development, Khan says: “As a young boy I had violent tendencies; the hot blood of the Pathans was in my veins. But in jail I had nothing to do except read the Koran. I read about the Prophet Mohammed in Mecca, about his patience, his suffering, his dedication. I had read it all before, as a child, but now I read it in the light of what I was hearing all around me about Gandhi’s struggle against the British... That changed my life forever” (Anon. without date: 4). The personal dimension of Nonviolence was very important for Khan. In the first place he saw it as a tool to reform and regenerate the human personality (Flinders in Easwaran 1999: 196).

For King self-analysis was an essential prerequisite for love of the enemy (King 1999: 262). In nonviolence trainings, King included self-purification, the transformation of the internal attitude towards whites – from hate to love – as a necessary spiritual step (Lee 2006: 113-114).

Nhat Hanh doesn’t see mindfulness as a state that can be attained fully, but that has to be practiced constantly with an attitude of ‘beginner’s mind’ (Nhat Hanh 2007: 186).

Reflecting on the experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the deep ambivalence of all human beings became deeply real for Tutu. He realized that “each of us has this capacity for the most awful evil – all of us”. At the same time he maintains that “all of us, even I, have this remarkable capacity for good, for generosity, for magnanimity” (Tutu 1999: 76). Various people who got to know Tutu on a deep personal level, have credited him with considerable self-

knowledge (Allen 2006: 77) and capacity for self-criticism (Allen 2006: 276). His spiritual director stated that Tutu had a high regard for the sacrament of penance (Cull 1996: 35).

The peacebuilders experience themselves not as saints but as ambivalent human beings with good and bad sides, aware of their own fallibility as well as their own potential to grow, develop, learn. They willingly submit to discipline, self-examination and practice for the sake of personal development. They don't see themselves as possessing the truth, but on a way towards truth.

4.2.4 A non-dualistic Spirituality

With the qualification of the impossibility to analyse the interior of a human being fully, it appears justified to conclude that the selected peacebuilders were grounded in a non-dualistic spirituality that reflected the experience of or close connection to a Benevolent Ultimate that is seen to be in charge of reality. This also shows a correlation between a deep sense of connection to humanity (or the universe), a non-dualistic worldview on the one hand, and a connection to the Benevolent Ultimate, a non-dualistic spirituality on the other hand.

Being grounded in the close connection to the Benevolent Ultimate appears to be the foundation from which the work for peace springs forth. The mystical experience of union with the Ultimate can also be seen as the reason for their freedom to act prophetically, against the powers that be, as well as at times against their own group (Nolan 2008: 67).

William Shannon expresses the connection between the mystical and peace activism as follows: “[The] more one becomes aware of God, the more nonviolence enters into the picture. For contemplation (and I want this term to include contemplation’s more modest understudy, prayer of awareness) offers us an intuition of a oneness that underlies our superficial differences. This intuition of necessity begets nonviolence, which is simply living that oneness in everyday situations” (Shannon 1996:15).

This does not suggest that the peacebuilders first had a fully developed non-dualistic spirituality which has then found expression in a non-dualistic worldview and action for peace. As we have seen in terms of the spiritual growth of the peacebuilders, we may rather see these processes as circular or spiral, informing each other.

5. An emerging Interfaith Spirituality of Peace

Let us now return to our initial question about the commonalities among religious peacebuilders and the nature of the fundamental difference between violent religious actors and religious peacebuilders.

We have seen that like violent religious actors the examined religious peacebuilders are strongly dedicated to their religion, and they are also opposed to injustice against their own reference group. However, whereas the violent religious actors' religious fervor is *exclusive*, in opposition to other religions and truth claims, the religious peacebuilders' religiosity is *inclusive*, appreciating truth in other traditions, cultures and religions. Likewise, the violent religious actors' fight for justice is *exclusive* in the sense that they are *only* concerned about their own group, whereas the religious peacebuilders' fight for justice is *inclusive*: their primary concern may be a specific case of injustice (against their own group), but they are *also* concerned about other forms of injustice. In fact they have come to the point where they conceive of their struggle as against *any* form of injustice, domination, oppression, or exploitation.

We have found the reason for this in the difference between a basic *metaphysical dualism* which is reflected in a dualistic worldview of antagonisms on the one hand, and a *metaphysical non-dualism* which is reflected in a worldview of interdependence, interconnectedness, and basic unity. The first translates into the willingness or even duty to apply violence against satanized enemies; the second results in the opposite, the rejection of violence and the work for a comprehensive, positive peace.

In the light of this it appears that theories like Samuel Huntington's of a clash of civilizations (Huntington 1993) along religious lines which has attracted considerable attention recently, may not be that useful. As Amartya Sen has pointed out, this theory doesn't pay sufficient attention to processes of internal pluralism within civilizations and religions (Sen 2007). The results of the present study suggest that it may be appropriate to consider a different fault line: the one between violent religious actors and religious peacebuilders. This fault line goes right through every religion. It indicates fundamental differences *within* religious traditions as well as fundamental commonalities *across* religious traditions.

Roman Catholic monk Thomas Merton provides a good illustration of this in a tribute to Thich Nhat Hanh. Merton writes: "He is more my brother than many who are nearer to me by race and nationality, because he and I see things exactly the same way. ... We deplore [the war in Vietnam] for exactly the same reasons: human reasons, reasons of sanity, justice and love" (Merton 2006: 109).

This fault line corresponds with peace scholar Johan Galtung's concept of 'hard' and 'soft' aspects of religion (Galtung 1997/1998). In an image of a map with an epicenter, soft religion is close to this centre, it is "warm, compassionate, reaching out horizontally to everybody, to all life, to the whole world without ifs and buts, reservations and exceptions". Hard religion instead is further away from the centre where "[h]earts get frozen, love can no longer come forth; all people see is

what divides... Exclusiveness is built into their minds through axiomatic, watertight dogma, and into their behavior through vertical religious organizations” (Galtung 1997/98: ?).

Such a fault line reveals opportunities for interreligious dialogue and cooperation among ‘soft religionists’ across the religious spectrum. It should, however, not be a new wall between soft and hard religionists or between religious peacebuilders and violent religious actors. It may rather indicate the urgency of dialogue across this new fault line.

Lastly, what can we, religious people, learn from the results of this study? A few concluding thoughts:

There is only a relatively small number of violent religious actors. And most religious people would not act openly violently themselves. An interesting question however may be in which way supporting or condoning violence and wars, may have to do with a dualistic world view based on a dualistic spirituality.

But more directly, what can we learn from the religious peacebuilders? The tendency to canonize them as saints may not be useful as it puts them on a pedestal and emphasizes the difference between them and ordinary people. Gandhi had a problem with the title of Mahatma since this undermined his claim that every person could follow his path (Appleby 2000: 122). Nhat Hanh differentiates between devotional and practical aspects of faith and makes the point that beyond mere devotion it is *practicing* a belief which is transformational (Nhat Hanh 2007: 117).

Yet, an “inculcation of nonviolence as religious norm” (Appleby 2000 :284) or a reinforcement of the values of a compassionate core (Appleby 2000 :286) may also miss the mark if these processes are merely done from the outside, as ‘positive indoctrination’ and unrelated to a spirituality which is based on a non-dualistic experience of the Benevolent Ultimate.

Following the religious peacebuilders’ example may rather mean entering a constant double and circular movement of practice: between the outward practice of peace and the inward practice of prayer and meditation, and thus venturing ever deeper into a non-dualistic spirituality of peace as foundation for religious peacebuilding.

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