

# EDUCATION IN RELIGIOUS FREEDOM: PATH TO PEACE AND STABILITY

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## ABSTRACT

The author emphasizes the crucial relevance of religious liberty and freedom of expression for a harmonious and peaceful development of modern societies. He follows the prophetic Declaration of Religious Freedom of Second Vatican Council (1965) with its constitutional limitation of governmental powers in matters of religion. The high value of religious freedom is judged as bulwark of all human rights and true capstone of sound human and societal developments, which have to be guarded against any form of infringements. In this regard, a reasonable education in religious freedom and liberty is indispensable for young people of the twenty-first century. Education in religious freedom in the context of moral and religious formation is based on the dignity of every human person and promotes a deeper mutual and cultural understanding by respecting the conscience of every human person. It thus carries the potential to diminish conflicts and clashes in a sustainable way. Educational reforms in countries have to include the high value of religious liberty and freedom as a main element and condition for human dignity and a peaceful global development.

## INTRODUCTION

“The Bible is a cheap copy of the Koran,”<sup>1</sup> expressed Boston Marathon Bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev 2013 shortly before his terror attack. Coming from the former Soviet Union as ethnic Chechen and growing up in the US since he was 8 years old, it seems he lacked a minimum level of historical awareness in matters of religion, possibly due to not receiving any responsible form of religious education. “Many young Muslims from the former Soviet Union have only the haziest notion of their religious and cultural heritage, after 70 years of communism in the region for most of the twentieth century.”<sup>2</sup> Tsarnaev was left to construct “his own religion-based ideology, moving between often contradictory ideas as he explored different websites.”<sup>3</sup> This personal problem must not have bothered many other people, had

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<sup>1</sup> Lacey Burnette, “Bombing suspect went through radical ideological shift,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, April 21<sup>st</sup> 2013, accessed February 26, 2015, [http://www.stltoday.com/news/national/bombing-suspect-went-through-radical-ideological-shift/article\\_1701f653-ff0e-569d-8e9e-e888ef0cfe1f.html](http://www.stltoday.com/news/national/bombing-suspect-went-through-radical-ideological-shift/article_1701f653-ff0e-569d-8e9e-e888ef0cfe1f.html).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

his terror action not taken the lives of four people and maimed many more forever. To the example of Tsarnaev we could add today hundreds of similar cases.

One claim of this paper – derived from a Catholic Perspective – is that a sound moral and religious education of children and students in the twenty-first century has to become central for all societies. This education in morals and religion must include education in the value and the human right of religious liberty and freedom as one major core goal. Of course, the vast majority of people wish to enjoy religious freedom for themselves and there is not problem to grant it generally and verbally to others.<sup>4</sup> But the difficult challenge is whether people and religious institutions are ready to grant religions liberty and freedom *in fact* to other people, e.g. to one's own family member who chooses another religion or to practice none. At this point the real test of religious liberty sets in, for individuals, for families, for religious communities, for cultures, and for political institutions. The paper focuses on the reasons and relevance of education for religious liberty both for personal and societal wellbeing in the societies of the twenty-first century.

#### **FREEDOM OF RELIGION IS CHALLENGED TODAY AS NEVER BEFORE**

Many religious minorities suffer “various forms of exclusion, sometimes due to explicit suppression of religious freedom or discrimination against that group.”<sup>5</sup> This is a problem both in non-secular countries where the state upholds an established religion (like Islam or Buddhism, etc.), as well as in highly-secular countries based on strong forms of laicism or communism. “Many religious minorities suffer various forms of exclusion, sometimes due to explicit suppression of religious freedom or discrimination against that group – a problem particularly common in non-secular countries where the state upholds an established religion.”<sup>6</sup> People can face various forms of intimidations, discriminations (socially, institutionally, legally, employment-related, etc.), forced conversion, suppression of personal and public-communal religious expression and worship, suppressions of freely chosen conversions, imprisonment, and even the sacrifice of life.<sup>7</sup> “What will it take for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to speak out about the mounting violence against India’s religious minorities? Attacks at Christian places of worship have prompted no response from the man elected to represent and to protect all of India’s citizens. Nor has he addressed the mass conversion to Hinduism of Christians and Muslims who have

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” in *Challenges to Religious Liberty in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Gerald V. Bradley (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 193-207, here 194n5.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, *Human Development Report 2004. Cultural Liberty in Today’s Diverse World*, 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> John L. Allen, Jr., *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (New York: Image Books, 2013), 32f.

been coerced or promised money,” wrote the Editorial of the *New York Times* in February 2015.<sup>8</sup>

In recent years the world experienced an alarming increase of threats against Christians with an estimated 100 million persecuted in one way or the other, especially in Islamic and Communistic countries.<sup>9</sup> Christians are the “most persecuted religious body on the planet,” according to John Allen.<sup>10</sup> At least 7,000 Christians are killed every year because of their faith, the number is a conservative estimate. Suppressions and violence can be directed against individuals, families, communities and whole countries, as happened among other places recently in Mali, Nigeria, Syria, and in the Central African Republic. In fact the world faces a “Global War on Christians,” since “80 % of all acts of religious discrimination in the world today are directed at Christians.”<sup>11</sup> This situation calls for in-depth reflections in order to find workable solutions. Reasons feeding terroristic tendencies are prevalent and sustained injustices but also ill-advised military responses by the West in combination with grave disregard of cultures and religions in other countries. The scope of this paper is limited to another element: the civic value and human right of religious liberty and freedom. But promoting this value and right in societies globally would require that the children and the youth receive at least a minimum amount of a responsible form of moral and religious education at schools. Recent remarks by Sheik Ahmed al-Tayeb, grand imam of Al-Azhar in Cairo, are hinting in a similar direction. He blamed “corrupt interpretations” of the Quran and of the life of Prophet Muhammad for the rise of Middle East-based terrorism. The rise of terrorism stemmed from “historical accumulations of tendencies of extremism in our heritage, which originated from corrupt interpretations of some of the texts of the Quran and the Sunnah,” he said, referring to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. He issued his appeal for a reform of an educational reform in the Muslim world in Mecca, Saudi Arabia—Islam’s holiest city—at a gathering of 700 moderate Muslim clerics from various countries.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Modi’s Dangerous Silence,” *New York Times*, February 7, 2015, Editorial.

<sup>9</sup> Christa Chorherr, *Im Schatten des Halbmonds. Christenverfolgung in islamischen Ländern* (Graz: Styriabooks, 2013). The Index of Persecution of Christians in Countries worldwide 2015 is topped by North-Korea, followed by Somalia; see: Statista: The Statistics Portal, accessed February 26, 2015, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/271002/persecution-of-christians-worldwide/>.

<sup>10</sup> Allen, *The Global War on Christians*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmed Al Omran, Tamer El-Ghobashy, “Top Cleric Calls for Educational Reform in Muslim World: Head of Al-Azhar says ‘corrupt interpretations’ of Islam causing terrorism,” *Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 23, 2015; accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/top-cleric-calls-for-educational-reform-in-muslim-world-1424713772>.

## THE HUMAN RIGHT OF FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, CONSCIENCE AND RELIGION

The UN-Declaration from 1948 states that every human person “has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”<sup>13</sup> The actual situation today is a far cry from this solemn theoretical assertion, with freedom of conscience and religion increasingly hindered and threatened to develop. More research is also necessary to find ways to properly balance the most important values in societies, like the high value of freedom of expression with other social values. But it is appropriate to ask whether modern societies make enough efforts to take those people serious who are motivated by an honest and reasonable conscience and religious conviction. Too often people seem to have no other choice than to sacrifice their freedom of thought and conscience on the altar of special interests or current political correctness.

Closely linked with the issue of religious freedom is the value of freedom of expression. Journalists and people of media increasingly face in many places threats against their life. In the last 10 years over 600 journalists and media workers have been killed globally pursuing their job, which leaves, on average, one journalist killed per week.<sup>14</sup> International media companies appealed in 2013 to the UN-Security Council when the number of killed journalists reached 60 in that year and 340 others were already put into prison.<sup>15</sup> The Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Frank La Rue, called on international bodies, including the UN Security Council, to take action against this new scourge of humanity. “Without paying systematic attention to all attacks against the press, without ending impunity, it is very difficult to ensure the safety of journalists,” the UN Special Rapporteur warned the UN Security Council.<sup>16</sup> The killing of 12 journalists and security staff on January 8, 2015 in Paris was an unquestionable attack on the fundamental value of freedom of expression in societies. Humanity has globally still a long way to go to achieve authentic and lasting freedom of thought and public expression, and especially of religious liberty and freedom. In this paper

can only focus on certain implications of the latter from the context of a Catholic

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<sup>13</sup> United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, accessed December 12, 2013, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a18>.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. “Un Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalist,” accessed December 15, 2013, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/safety-of-journalists/un-plan-of-action/>.

<sup>15</sup> Die Furche – Die Österreichische Wochenzeitung, no. 47 (November 27th 2013), 23.

<sup>16</sup> “Security Council must pay more attention to attacks on journalists,” Report from December 13, 2013 by Frank La Rue, Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression; accessed December 13, 2013, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46736#.WPnm16L-thE>.

perspective.

## THE DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY *DIGNITATIS HUMANAE* OF VATICAN II

A long journey led the Catholic Church to its historic formulation on religious liberty *Dignitatis Humanae* (*DH*) in the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). It is not possible to deal here comprehensively with historical questions and developments related to freedom of religion before and after the time of Constantine in the fourth century up to our time.<sup>17</sup> In its official declarations *DH* the Roman Catholic Church gives witness to a long and difficult learning process over centuries to accept and promote finally religious liberty. Painful experiences in the first part of the twentieth century paved finally the way that led to the Declaration on Religious Liberty in 1965, which brought “a basic clarification of the relationship of church and modern state.”<sup>18</sup> The “recognition of the “right for freedom of religion and conscience is perhaps the biggest step towards the recognition of the liberal political culture of modernity and of human rights.”<sup>19</sup>

The formulation of this declaration gained from philosophical and theological insights as well as from “public discussions that had arisen in connection with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations in 1948.”<sup>20</sup> During the council itself, the Declaration ripened among the Fathers after intense struggles and heated debates. Crucial for this were the presence of excellent theologians and the historical experiences of some Fathers behind the iron curtain, two groups strongly favouring approval. The Declaration was finally accepted and solemnly approved by an overwhelming majority of 2308 Fathers on December 7, 1965 with only 70 votes against it and eight abstentions.<sup>21</sup> The central passage of “one of the most important conciliar documents”<sup>22</sup> reads as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. John T. Noonan, Jr., and Edward McGlynn Gaffney, Jr. (eds.), *Religious Freedom: History, Cases, and Other Materials on the Interaction of Religion and Government*, 3rd ed. (New York: Foundation Press/Thomas Reuters, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Ingeborg Gabriel, “Freiheit und gesellschaftlicher Auftrag der Kirchen in einer demokratischen Gesellschaft,” in *Freiheit und Verantwortung der Kirche in der Gesellschaft*, ed. Idem (Wien: Verlag Herold, 1995), 55-66, here 60 (trans. FG).

<sup>19</sup>Ingeborg Gabriel, “Grundzüge und Positionen Katholischer Sozialethik,” in Ingeborg Gabriel, Alexandros K. Papaderos, and Ulrich Körtner, *Perspektiven ökumenischer Sozialethik: Der Auftrag der Kirchen im größeren Europa*, 2nd ed., Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünwald Verlag, 2006, 127-226, here 179 (tr. FG).

<sup>20</sup> Hünermann, “The Final Weeks of the Council,” 452.

<sup>21</sup> Josef Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1966), 211.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Hünermann, “The Final Weeks of the Council: V. *Dignitatis Humanae*: A Creative Solution,” in *History of Vatican II*. Vol. V. The Council and the Transition: The Fourth Period and the End of the Council September 1965 – December 1965, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, English version ed. Joseph A. Komonchak, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Maryknoll: Orbis/Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 451-457.

The Vatican council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that everyone should be immune from coercion by individuals, social groups and every human power so that, within due limits, no men or women are forced to act against their convictions nor are any persons to be restrained from acting in accordance with their convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others. The council further declares that the right to religious freedom is based on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom must be given such recognition in the constitutional order of society as will make it a civil right.<sup>23</sup>

The Fathers of the Church argued based on “the dignity of the human person as something that must be respected in principle by all institutions. Part of the very core of the dignity of the person is the religious relationship with God.”<sup>24</sup> The way to believe in God must be in freedom (*DH* 9), not with any form of coercion: “the human person is to be guided by his own judgement and to enjoy freedom” (*DH* 11). Freedom is also the way of God’s own incarnation in Jesus Christ, who respects human freedom, and who accepted his suffering “freely” to offer humankind “salvation and true freedom” (*DH* 11). Jesus Christ “did not wish to be a political Messiah who would dominate by force but preferred to call himself the son of man who came to serve” (*DH* 11). The document *DH* calls further for a “legal limitation of public power”<sup>25</sup> in dealing with “man’s spiritual values, and especially with what concerns the free practice of religion in society” (*DH* 1). Freedom of religion requires “freedom from coercion in civil society” and leaves “intact the traditional Catholic teaching on the moral duty of individuals and societies towards the true religion and the one Church of Christ” (*DH* 1). Thus, the Declaration “avoids an individualistic interpretation of freedom of conscience; it does not allow for public life a purely private conception of religion that is rooted in an agnostic theory of tolerance and puts all religions on the same level; it does not grant the state tutelage over religion, but neither can the religions or the Churches use state-sponsored coercion to preserve their public status.”<sup>26</sup> Based on the dignity of the human person the right for religious liberty must be enshrined in national constitutions and civil rights codices, which means basically a constitutional limitation of governmental powers in matters of religion. Therefore, *DH* defines “in a balanced way the relationship of believing men and women and of the Church, as well as of other religious communities, to the modern state and to society [...]. The document also makes a clear distinction ‘between proselytism and freedom to bear witness’.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Vatican II, Declaration on Religious Liberty *Dignitatis Humanae* (7<sup>th</sup> December 1965), no. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Hünermann, “The Final Weeks of the Council,” 453.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

Given the global extension of the Catholic Church and the radiation of this declaration inside and outside of it, this authoritative statement promotes a peaceful development in our world.<sup>28</sup> But the long-term practical implementation of the value of religions liberty on the global context is very challenging. A hopeful sign is that recently more attention is paid to issues of religious freedom by political science and some politicians, after many religiously motivated terror attacks globally. The Declaration *DH* is in our contemporary world of highest relevance in theory and practice and for all levels of societies. Peter Hünemann concludes that by their profound examination of the doctrine of religious freedom, the fathers of the Council gave a theological dimension to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. From this point of view, *Dignitatis Humanae* has doubtless played an important role in the process of evangelizing modern culture. [...] By their religious justification of religious freedom, the Council fathers provided the other religions with a model of how they too, in light of their own roots, can approach the idea and conception of religious freedom without surrendering their own identity and mission.<sup>29</sup>

*Dignitatis Humanae* expresses clearly that in religion people should be free “from coercion in civil society.” This freedom is understood “in due limits,” meaning, as long as the believers do not harm anybody else or themselves.

This right for religious liberty is challenged and endangered in many societies today, even in modern western societies, as for instance in some countries people can be forced to support abortion despite their strong conscientious and/or religious objections against it.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2005) speaks of the “paramount value of the right to religious freedom”<sup>31</sup> and this right and its actual application can always become endangered by new developments and powerful special interests and systems. *Dignitatis Humanae* admonishes to keep guard over the high value of freedom of religion, which is central for a sound and stable development of societies. “The effective recognition of the right to freedom of conscience and religious freedom is one of the highest goods and one of the most serious duties of every people that truly wishes to ensure the good

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<sup>28</sup> “Der kulturelle und religiöse Pluralismus [...] lässt sich nur bewältigen, wenn der moderne Pluralismus nicht nur als eine unvermeidliche Tatsache oder vorübergehendes Übel, sondern als Wertidee betrachtet und entwickelt wird. Exemplarisch lässt sich dies meines Erachtens an dem umwälzenden Schritt verdeutlichen, den die katholische Kirche mit der Anerkennung der Religionsfreiheit und damit des Pluralismus als Wert vollzogen hat. Wie sich zeigen lässt, hat die Tatsache, dass eine der großen religiösen Traditionen, die bis weit in das 20. Jahrhundert hinein den Pluralismus nur zähneknirschend duldete, zur Religionsfreiheit gefunden hat, die Chancen für ein humanes Zusammenleben weltweit erhöht.” Karl Gabriel, “Fragmentierte Gesellschaft und die Suche nach humanem Zusammenleben” in Gerhard Mertens (ed.), *Fragmentierte Gesellschaft – Einheit der Bildung*, Münstersche Gespräche zur Pädagogik 23 (Münster, 2007), 11-23, here 18.

<sup>29</sup> Hünemann, “The Final Weeks of the Council,” 457.

<sup>30</sup> Indystar, accessed December 12, 2013, <http://www.indystar.com/article/20130926/OPINION10/309260028>.

<sup>31</sup> *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 155.

of the individual and of society.”<sup>32</sup>

### **THE RIGHT FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AS *THE* CORNERSTONE OF ALL HUMAN RIGHTS**

The right of religious liberty and freedom is grounded in dignity of the human person “in so far as it touches the most intimate sphere of the spirit, sustains and is as it were the *raison d’être* of other freedoms. And the profession of a religion, although it consists primarily in interior acts of the spirit, involves the entire experience of human life, and thus all its manifestations.”<sup>33</sup> This right lays the foundations for all other human rights and thus for a peaceful societal coexistence:

In the first place, religious freedom, an essential requirement of the dignity of every person, is a cornerstone of the structure of human rights, and for this reason an irreplaceable factor in the good of individuals and of the whole of society, as well as of the personal fulfillment of each individual. It follows that the freedom of individuals and of communities to profess and practice their religion is an essential element for peaceful human coexistence. Peace, which is built up and consolidated at all levels of human association, puts down its roots in the freedom and openness of consciences to truth.<sup>34</sup>

The value and right of Religious Liberty is in line with the natural order of human beings living in a human society and it recognizes this “natural order that govern human association and determine the conditions for peace.”<sup>35</sup>

The foundation and goal of the social order is the human person, as a subject of inalienable rights which are not conferred from outside but which arise from the person's very nature. Nothing and nobody can destroy them, and no external constraint can annihilate them, for they are rooted in what is most profoundly human. Likewise, the person is not merely the subject of social, cultural and historical conditioning, for it is proper to man, who has a spiritual soul, to tend towards a goal that transcends the changing conditions of his existence. No human power may obstruct the realization of man as a person.<sup>36</sup>

Societies develop and exist for the wellbeing of human persons and from this follows that every “society must be organized in such a way as to enable and indeed to help man to realize his vocation in full freedom.”<sup>37</sup> Freedom is most important for

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 553.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1988: Religious Freedom: Condition for Peace, Vatican, December 8, 1987, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19871208\\_xxi-world-day-for-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19871208_xxi-world-day-for-peace.html).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

the development of a human person and of societies. “Freedom is man's most noble prerogative. Beginning with the most private options, all individuals must be able to express themselves in an act of conscious choice, each following his or her own conscience. Without freedom, human acts are empty and valueless.”<sup>38</sup> A person must be able to follow his or her innermost values and convictions to pursue a meaningful and fulfilling human life, which in turn not only benefits the individual person but the common good and whole human society. To be able to listen to one's conscience and to form it properly “belongs to the dignity of the person to be able to respond to the moral imperative of one's own conscience in the search for truth.”<sup>39</sup> Coming from behind the iron curtain, Archbishop Karol Wojtyla (later Pope John Paul II) was a vehement defender of the right for religious liberty at Vatican II. “The respect of this right is an indicative sign of ‘man's authentic progress in any regime, in any society, system or milieu.’”<sup>40</sup> Becoming Pope, he emphasized in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* the relevance of the recognition of the religious dimension for human life:

Respect for the dignity of the person, which implies the defense and promotion of human rights, demands the recognition of the religious dimension of the individual. This is not simply a requirement “concerning matters of faith,” but a requirement that finds itself inextricably bound up with the very reality of the individual. In fact, the individual's relation to God is a constitutive element of the very “being” and “existence” of an individual: it is in God that we “live, move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Even if not all believe this truth, the many who are convinced of it have the right to be respected for their faith and for their life-choice, individual and communal, that flows from that faith. This is the right of freedom of conscience and religious freedom, the effective acknowledgment of which is among the highest goods and the most serious duties of every people that truly wishes to assure the good of the person and society.<sup>41</sup>

#### RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AT THE SERVICE OF THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

The value and right of “religious liberty” is principally a matter of the external political and societal ramifications of the civic life of countries. It does not dispense any individual person or religious institution from the serious challenge to search for truth. Thus, in the Catholic understanding, the value of religious liberty is fully compatible with the “sacred responsibility” of a human person or institution to search for truth. Religious liberty does not “diminish the seriousness of God's call, contained in his saving revelation, or make God's demands on men optional. Rather, the problem was to clarify the way in which God's call comes to man – as an appeal to

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 39.

his free choice, which alone can respond to God's call in love, saying 'Yes, I do'.<sup>42</sup> The right of religious liberty facilitates the search for truth in a given society rather than putting obstacles to its development. Religious liberty opens the possibility for people to live a life in accord with their conscience and identity, where the intimate encounter of the human person with God takes place.

With the recognition of the right of religious liberty is not entailed the waiving of truth claims of the Christian faith [...] The right for religious liberty facilitates the proclamation of eternal truth and does not entail to give it up [...] Religious freedom and truth claims are interconnected, they do not exclude each other.<sup>43</sup>

The conscience has a prominent place in Catholic teaching. There people "are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths [...] Through loyalty to conscience, Christians are joined to others in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships" (*Gaudium et Spes* 16). The crucial role of human conscience and personal freedom gets clarified further:

But genuine freedom is an exceptional sign of the image of God in humanity. For God willed that men and women should "be left free to make their own decisions" so that they might of their own accord seek their creator and freely attain their full and blessed perfection by cleaving to God. Their dignity therefore requires them to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by their own blind impulses or by external constraint. (*Gaudium et Spes* 17).

Personal freedom and especially freedom of religion is thus a main condition for a life in human dignity and integral human and societal development, as Pope John Paul II emphasized in his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*:

This is why the Church has always considered the act of entrusting oneself to God to be a moment of fundamental decision which engages the whole person. In that act, the intellect and the will display their spiritual nature, enabling the subject to act in a way which realizes personal freedom to the full. It is not just that freedom is part of the act of faith: it is absolutely required. Indeed, it is faith that allows individuals to give consummate expression to their own freedom. Put differently, freedom is not realized in decisions made against God. For how could it be an exercise of true freedom to refuse to be open to the very reality which enables our self-realization? Men and women can accomplish no more important act in their lives than the act of faith; it is here that freedom reaches the certainty of truth and chooses to live in that truth.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 207.

<sup>43</sup> Wolfgang Thönissen, "Ökumene und Religionsfreiheit," in *Politik und Theologie in Europa: Perspektiven ökumenischer Sozialethik*, ed. Ingeborg Gabriel (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 2008), 104-127, here 116 (tr. FG).

<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, 11.

Freedom of religion and expression is of precious value, but has to be lived “in due limits” (*DH*, no. 2). The limits of freedom of religion are the limits set by other fundamental rights, for instance, the ringing of church bells during the night is considered unreasonable because it violates the right to sleep. “Freedom is a vulnerable thing, which can easily destroy itself if used without restriction. Freedom itself demands that the freedom of the individual be protected against the abuse of freedom in its many forms.”<sup>45</sup> A person living freedom reasonably and responsibly knows when and how to set limits,<sup>46</sup> by being able to accept the freedom of others even when it is difficult.<sup>47</sup> “Freedom takes up the responsibility for a world, so that by their relations the destinations of all humans towards a life in freedom is enhanced and its representation can find a common expression.”<sup>48</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI focused on building a world enlivened by charity. “These efforts have to include a recognition of the central role of authentic religious values in responding to man’s deepest concerns, and in supplying the ethical motivation for his personal and social responsibilities. These are the criteria by which Christians should assess the political programmes of their leaders.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* emphasizes “the paramount value of the right to religious freedom.”<sup>50</sup> The recognition of the “right to freedom of conscience and religious freedom is one of the highest goods and one of the most serious duties of every people that truly wishes to ensure the good of the individual and of society.”<sup>51</sup>

The right to freedom of religion, both in its private and in its public dimension, manifests the unity of the human person, who is at once a citizen and a believer. It also legitimizes the fact that believers have a contribution to make to the building up of society. Strengthening religious freedom consolidates social bonds, nourishes the

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<sup>45</sup> Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 211.

<sup>46</sup> “Denn Autonomie heißt ja nichts anderes, als daß die Freiheit sich selber Gesetz ist, sich selbst als Aufgabe gegeben”, Thomas Pröpfer, “Autonomie und Solidarität. Begründungsprobleme sozialetischer Verpflichtung,” in *Jahrbuch für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften* 36 (1995): 11-26, 15.

<sup>47</sup> “*Freiheit soll andere Freiheit unbedingt anerkennen*. Der ethische Ernst dieser Forderung wird freilich erst sichtbar, wenn sie nicht nur auf die glücklichen Fälle begrenzt bleibt, wo ein Wechselverhältnis gegenseitiger Anerkennung zustande kommt und gelingt, sondern auch dort noch befolgt wird, wo die Bejahung einseitig und ohne Erwiderung bleibt und sich zu den Kosten und Risiken innovatorischen Handelns bereifinden muß. Es ist gerade dieser Verzicht auf jede Bedingung, das Interesse am Freisein und somit auch Freiwerden der Anderen, aller Anderen, was der Idee der Solidarität erst ihre ethische Dignität gibt”, Pröpfer, “Autonomie und Solidarität,” 16 (see note 32).

<sup>48</sup> Pröpfer, “Autonomie und Solidarität” 16 (see note 32; trans. FG). The original in German: “Freiheit trägt Verantwortung für eine Welt, durch deren Verhältnisse die Bestimmung aller Menschen zur Freiheit gefördert wird und ihre Anerkennung eine gemeinsame Darstellung findet.”

<sup>49</sup> Benedict XVI, Message for Lent 2006, 29 September 2005, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/len/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20050929\\_lent-2006.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/len/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20050929_lent-2006.html).

<sup>50</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington D.C.: USCCB Communications, 2005), no. 155.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 553.

hope of a better world, creates favorable conditions for peace and harmonious development, while at the same time establishing solid foundations for securing the rights of future generations.<sup>52</sup>

This is of special importance today for Muslim societies, which have to develop and appreciate the value of religious liberty and freedom in their own traditions. “The strength of Islamist radicalism derives from certain claims inferred from Islam’s sacred texts. The central claim is that God wills the world to be subject to Islam – elaborated in such concepts as *tawhid* (the absolute oneness of God), *jihad* (the struggle to serve God’s purposes), and *shari’a* (the path to be followed in Muslim life).”<sup>53</sup> Radical and fundamentalist Muslims do not accept universal rational discourses. “The radicals insist that their central claim – God’s desire for Islam’s triumph – requires no interpretation. True Muslims will pursue it by any means necessary, including dissimulation, civil coercion, and the killing of innocents.”<sup>54</sup> The challenging issue of religions and violence has to be studied properly, especially how religions can serve and promote nonviolence and peace in societies. After centuries of struggles, it was made clear within Catholic teaching, that the justification of violence in the name of God or religion poses a strong contradiction to the Christian understanding of God and religion. The global Muslim communities have to solve a similar challenge today:

The rise of religious fundamentalism during the second half of the twentieth century has resulted in a new conflict pattern, one in which terrorism plays a major role. Somehow religious tensions became so extreme that religion is employed to undertake ‘legitimate’ atrocities against innocent civilians. Religious fundamentalism is a peculiar phenomenon as it goes against the main trend of secularization that has been typical of the world since the French Enlightenment movement. Fundamentalist groups are to be found in all of the world religions, but fundamentalism as a political movement is especially strong in certain groups in the Muslim civilization.<sup>55</sup>

The lecture of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in 2006 at the University in Regensburg, Germany can help to get a deeper understanding of the issues involved. Benedict XVI highlighted in his lecture the reasonableness of the Christian understanding of God and he did “a great service, both to the free world and to Islam

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<sup>52</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at the Holy Mass at the Plaza de la Revolución José Martí, Havana, March 28th, 2012, Apostolic Journey to Mexico and the Republic of Cuba, March 23-29, 2012; [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20120328\\_la-habana.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20120328_la-habana.html).

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” *Challenges to Religious Liberty in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Gerald V. Bradley (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 193-207, here 200.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Jan-Erik Lane, *Globalization: Interdependencies & Coordination* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2014), 213.

itself, to bring up this precise quandary about rationality.”<sup>56</sup> One root of religious motivated terrorism consists in a wrong understanding of God based on *voluntarism* as opposed to the Catholic understanding of a *reasonable* God. Benedict XVI defended the reasonableness of the Christian understanding of God and also of religious acts performed by humans who try to follow the will of God. “God does not become more divine when we push him away from us in a sheer, impenetrable voluntarism; rather, the truly divine God is the God who has revealed himself as *logos* and, as *logos*, has acted and continues to act lovingly on our behalf.”<sup>57</sup> The Christian God is *not* understood as “pure will,” *sola voluntas*, as Muslim terrorists claim Allah to be, adhering to an absolute voluntarist understanding of God, as James Schall points out:<sup>58</sup>

Here lies the real root of terrorism. This is the Allah who wills that all the world be submitted to the rites, principles, and laws that are set down in the Koran. Such a voluntarist Allah sees no problem with the use of violence in achieving this purpose. Such a god, in the Christian view, cannot be reasonable. Indeed, he cannot be God. This is why Islam, Judaism, and Christianity must decide whether in fact they do worship the same One God *that is*. Certainly, if the voluntarist Allah is the true conception of Allah, then Christians do not worship the same God.<sup>59</sup>

The Christian reasonable understanding of God is different to a voluntarist understanding of God, because one main article of the Christian Creed professes that God became a human being, took on flesh, became *logos*, approachable and reasonable in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The Christian understanding of God is thus not voluntarist, but personal, reasonable, relational, as the God who is by his very nature “love”, building up relationships and community.

Here is also an ecclesiological bridge towards the responsible role of the faith (Church) community as institution to interpret reasonable Christian religious doctrines and practices. This is somehow lacking in parts of the Muslim world, where there seems to be no reasonable responsible universal institutional religious body to supervise teaching and practice of leaders and followers of their faith.

Generally there is a need in global societies for a better understanding of world religions and their spiritualities and how they relate to the experience of human freedom and developments on the individual and society level. The formation of human consciousness and the whole dimension of moral and religions education is my view crucial in view of a more peaceful and harmonious global development, as again Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI expressed a long time ago:

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<sup>56</sup> James V. Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine Press, 2007), 51f.

<sup>57</sup> Benedict XVI, Faith, Reason, and the University. Memories and Reflections. Lecture at the University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006, in Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture*, 138).

<sup>58</sup> Schall, *The Regensburg Lecture*, 45: “Those who do hold that God or Allah is pure will claim themselves to be pious, to be obedient to God.”

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

It is a fact that human history moves relentlessly toward unification of mankind, then this unification must not be a mere economic unification through technological achievement. It must become a unification in view of human values, a unification of the spirit and of what is highest in the human spirit, its relationship with God. A unification which is not unification in spirit would lead mankind to ultimate self-destruction through a conflict between external cooperation and inner antagonism.<sup>60</sup>

### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IS COMPATIBLE WITH MISSION

Today the Catholic Church promotes in theory and hopefully in her practical life religious liberty, which is also fully compatible with her missionary activity. “Her mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. *The Church proposes; she imposes nothing*. She respects individuals and cultures, and she honours the sanctuary of conscience.”<sup>61</sup> During Vatican II it became clear to the assembled Fathers that the universal mission of the Church presupposes as one non-contradictory condition the promotion of religious liberty and freedom. Some Fathers and theologians expressed even their surprise that religious liberty was enshrined so late into official Church teaching, like Joseph Ratzinger, who wrote bluntly that “force used to promote faith injures nothing so much in the long run as this faith itself.”<sup>62</sup>

A faith which demands, on the basis of its claim to universality, universal freedom to preach its message to all nations in the midst of their traditional religions, must also affirm freedom of belief as a basic religious form. Otherwise it would contradict itself. Thus the idea of mission provides the intrinsic basis for the idea of religious liberty, and this liberty is visibly and intrinsically involved in what is most fundamental in the revealed Christian message. It is therefore all the more scandalous that so much prodding from the de-Christianized world was needed to make the Church realize and recall what belongs to its own nature.<sup>63</sup>

More historical research is necessary to understand why it took such a long time for the Catholic Church to accept its very “own nature” of granting religious liberty and freedom, which builds also the basis for missionary activity. A formulation by the philosopher John Locke in 1689 may suffice here: “The toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind as

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<sup>60</sup> Josef Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 247-48.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 210.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it in so clear a light.”<sup>64</sup>

### **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AS PATH TOWARDS JUSTICE, PEACE, AND STABILITY**

In Catholic understanding to be religious is “at the very core what it means to be human. It is also one of the linchpins of stable, durable self-governance. Religious liberty is a precondition for democracy and therefore for the social, economic, political, and religious benefits such a system conveys to its citizens, as well as to its neighbours and to the international order.”<sup>65</sup> The value and right to religious liberty and freedom is crucial for the good of persons and of a just and harmonious development of a society. “The presence of religious freedom is highly correlated with political, social, and economic goods.”<sup>66</sup> Religious freedom is orienting persons and communities for the common good and thus for the better. “Most advanced statistical tests suggest there is indeed a critical independent contribution that religious freedom is making.”<sup>67</sup> It is also evident that the “lack of respect for freedom of conscience, and in this regard especially the value of religious freedom, which was recognized and guaranteed in the constitutions, was one of the essential reasons for the collapse of real socialism.”<sup>68</sup> Religious freedom helps to keep extreme ideologies, even corruption, and injustices at bay in societies.

In this sense it can be said that religious freedom is a very important means of strengthening a people's moral integrity. Civil society can count on believers who, because of their deep convictions, will not only not succumb readily to dominating ideologies or trends but will endeavour to act in accordance with their aspirations to all that is true and right, an essential condition for securing peace.<sup>69</sup>

As religious freedom is at the core of the human question for truth and of other freedoms and rights, it “contributes decisively to producing citizens who are genuinely free: for by making possible the quest for and acceptance of the truth about man and the world it helps all individuals to gain a full understanding of their own

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<sup>64</sup> John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, in *Great Books of the Western World* 33, 2nd ed., ed. Mortimer J. Adler (Chicago et al.: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1-22, here 2.

<sup>65</sup> Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” 193.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>67</sup> Brian J. Grim, “Religious Freedom: Good for What Ails Us,” *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 6.2 (2008): 3-7; quoted from Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” 203.

<sup>68</sup> Ingeborg Gabriel, “Freiheit und gesellschaftlicher Auftrag der Kirchen in einer demokratischen Gesellschaft,” in *Freiheit und Verantwortung der Kirche in der Gesellschaft*, ed. Idem (Wien: Verlag Herold, 1995), 55-66, here 58 (trans. FG).

<sup>69</sup> John Paul II, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1988: Religious Freedom: Condition for Peace, Vatican, December 8, 1987.

dignity. It also helps them to take up their duties with greater responsibility. An honest relationship with the truth is an essential condition for authentic freedom.”<sup>70</sup>

More research has to be done to explore the correlations of religious freedom in a given society and the overall level of justice, harmony, and stability in it. But it should be clear, that the suppression of freedom of expression and of religious freedom has a strong negative impact on the overall harmonious development of societies by making them more vulnerable to develop reductionist ideologies and anomalies, unjust conditions and structures, which can cause societal instabilities and grave harm, e.g. by resulting in accidents.

Pope John Paul II linked freedom of religion explicitly with the integral and comprehensive development of human persons and societies.<sup>71</sup> “Religious freedom, which is still at times limited or restricted, remains the premise and guarantee of all the freedoms that ensure the common good of individuals and peoples. It is to be hoped that authentic religious freedom will be granted to all people everywhere.”<sup>72</sup> Although Pope John Paul II laid out in 1987 clearly some political implications of upholding Religious Liberty, unfortunately, this issue has been underestimated and even neglected for decades in the field of political science and political practice. “But when despots such as Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak or Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah deal with extremism by arbitrary arrest, torture, and execution, they are in fact ensuring its survival and its export. Decades of American support for tyrants in the Middle East have helped retard the growth of moderate political Islam. History strongly suggests that political and religious repression, while not the root cause of Islamic extremism, blocks its most effective remedy – the development of liberal democratic political theologies.”<sup>73</sup> In the long run no government can neglect basic anthropological realities or should base her policies on wrong philosophical and societal assumptions.

The civil and social right to religious freedom, inasmuch as it touches the most intimate sphere of the spirit, is a point of reference of the other fundamental rights and in some way becomes a measure of them. For it is a matter of respecting the individual's most jealously guarded autonomy, thus making it possible to act according to the dictates of conscience both in private choices and in social life. The State cannot claim authority, direct or indirect, over a person's religious convictions. It cannot arrogate to itself the right to impose or to impede the profession or public practice of religion by a person or a community. In this matter, it is the duty of civil authorities to ensure that the rights of individuals and communities are equally respected, and at the same time it is their duty to safeguard proper public order. Even in cases where the State grants a special juridical position to a particular religion, there is a duty to ensure that the right to freedom of conscience is legally

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), no. 17.

<sup>72</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990), no. 39.

<sup>73</sup> Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” 202.

recognized and effectively respected for all citizens, and also for foreigners living in the country even temporarily for reasons of employment and the like. In no case may the civil organization set itself up as the substitute for the conscience of the citizens, nor may it remove or take the place of the freedom of action of religious associations. A right social order requires that all – as individuals and in groups – should be able to profess their religious convictions with full respect for others.<sup>74</sup>

Reduced or even wrong assumptions about the nature, relevance, and role of religion in societies were guiding policy makers for too long a time. “Our policymakers and diplomats seem to believe that the old secularization theory – the debunked idea that religion will move the margins as modernity advances – is somehow still operative.”<sup>75</sup> This was and is still the case in countries and many “have ignored the role of religion in shaping the world,”<sup>76</sup> as Madeleine Albright admitted: “Diplomats in my era were taught not to invite trouble, and no subject seemed more inherently treacherous than religion.”<sup>77</sup> Foreign policies have to develop a better rationale to deal with the issue of religion. “American diplomacy is distinctly uncomfortable with the whole topic of religion. Partly in consequence, its efforts on behalf of religious liberty have been anemic, poorly integrated into mainstream U.S. foreign policy, and largely ineffective.”<sup>78</sup> Since religious ideas and religious communities are prime drivers of cultures, we must “become as adept in understanding the religious realities in key countries as in their political and economic realities.”<sup>79</sup> Comprehensive strategies and clear programs have to be developed and applied “to encourage religious communities, such as Russian Orthodoxy or Afghan Sunnis, to engage in the democratic process and to do it by the exercise and defense of religious freedom.”<sup>80</sup> Religious extremism cannot be fought with military force alone. “The difficult task of containing radical Islam requires altering the *theological* dynamic that sustains it, a task that can be accomplished only by Muslims themselves,” and “only liberal democratic political Islam can defeat radical Islam.”<sup>81</sup> Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai’s assessment of the military solutions propagated by Western countries is quite devastating. “Radicalism did not disappear, but increased. There are more problems because of radicalism in our world today than anytime in human history. There are more problems related to radicalism in the region. Which

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<sup>74</sup> John Paul II, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1988: Religious Freedom: Condition for Peace, Vatican, December 8, 1987, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19871208\\_xxi-world-day-for-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19871208_xxi-world-day-for-peace.html).

<sup>75</sup> Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” 203.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>77</sup> Madeleine Albright, *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 8, quoted from: Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” 205.

<sup>78</sup> Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” 194.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

mistakes, which politics have led to this situation? These are questions upon which Americans and the West have to give answers.”<sup>82</sup>

Cultures and religions have to be taken more seriously in politics and political science. “Ordered liberty demands realism about human nature. If democracies are to succeed in highly religious societies, they must be grounded in religious freedom.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, political and civic institutions have to be developed for protecting this high value of religious liberty in societies, based on the firm conviction, that “even a partial denial of religious freedom, such as legal or social barriers against establishing religious schools or against the employment of religious judgments, and religiously informed moral judgments, in the public sphere, is an assault on human dignity and justice, as well as on the foundational moral and political principle of equality under the law.”<sup>84</sup> The state must stay positively neutral towards religions, that means the state should not mingle in the affairs of religious communities (provided they do not act against the law), and religious communities are hindered to use political forces for their goals.<sup>85</sup>

#### **RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOR PROMOTING GLOBAL STABILITY AND PEACE**

Religious liberty and freedom is highly relevant for the personal and societal wellbeing and for a harmonious global development and peace. “Without religious liberty, societies whose fates are bound up with our own are unlikely to be stable and peaceful. Most importantly, those nations that are currently net producers and exporters of religious extremisms and terrorism are unlikely to change unless they begin to grapple with the difficult issues of religious liberty, especially the relationship between religion and state.”<sup>86</sup> Cherishing the value and right of religious liberty and freedom promotes understanding and peace on a profoundly deep level in societies.

By leading people to a new understanding of their human condition, religious faith brings people, through a sincere gift of themselves, to a complete fellowship with other human beings [...]. Faith brings people together and unites them, makes them see others as their brothers and sisters; it makes them more attentive, more

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<sup>82</sup> “Karzai: Amerika und Nato haben ihr Ziel verfehlt”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung FAZ*, Frankfurt, Germany, February 23, 2015. The interview passage in German: “Radikalismus ist nicht verschwunden, er hat zugenommen. Es gibt mehr Probleme auf der Welt wegen Radikalismus als je zuvor in der Menschheitsgeschichte. Es gibt mehr Probleme in der Region wegen Radikalismus [...] Welche Fehler, welche Politik haben dazu geführt? Das sind alles Fragen, auf die die Amerikaner und der Westen eine Antwort geben müssen,” accessed February 25, 2015, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/naher-osten/karzai-wertet-nato-kampfeinsatz-in-afghanistan-als-misserfolg-13444082.html>.

<sup>83</sup> Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” 207.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>85</sup> “The use of civil authority to pursue blasphemy or defamation charges is occurring in parts of the Muslim world today and constitutes a serious threat to religious liberty.” Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility,” 197.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

responsible, more generous in their commitment to the common good. It is not just a matter of feeling better disposed to collaborating with others by reason of the fact that one's own rights are ensured and protected; it is rather a matter of drawing from the deepest resources of a right conscience higher incentives for the task of building a more just and more human society.<sup>87</sup>

The religious dimension “has a specific impact on the subject of peace, and that every attempt to impede or to coerce its free expression inevitably has grave negative effects upon the possibility of a peaceful society.”<sup>88</sup> People, institutions and NGOs raising awareness for and the protection of freedom of religion deserve full support. Issues of religious liberty have to be studied thoroughly and more widely in political science and addressed courageously by individual politicians and political parties, as done in the Coalition Pact 2013 of the German Government:

We support freedom of religions as basic human right. This applies also to the right not to join any religious community or to change one's religion. Solidarity with disadvantaged and suppressed religious minorities is of special importance for us. In many countries of the world Christians are especially suppressed, persecuted and expelled because of their faith, and religious conflicts are often mixed with social and economic issues. We support the international right for freedom of media and expression of opinion as an essential fundament of a liberal and democratic society. We back and protect courageous defenders of human rights and assist those forces in civil societies in need of our support.<sup>89</sup>

Political ramifications supporting freedom of expression and religion make a definitive difference on the way to more peaceful, just, harmonious, and stable societies.

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<sup>87</sup> John Paul II, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1988: Religious Freedom: Condition for Peace, Vatican, December 8, 1987, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19871208\\_xxi-world-day-for-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19871208_xxi-world-day-for-peace.html).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> *Coalition Pact*, 179 (translation FG). In German: “Wir treten für die Religionsfreiheit als elementares Menschenrecht ein. Dies gilt auch für das Recht, keiner Religionsgemeinschaft anzugehören und die Religion zu wechseln. Die Solidarität mit benachteiligten und unterdrückten religiösen Minderheiten ist uns ein besonderes Anliegen. In vielen Ländern der Welt werden besonders Christen wegen ihres Glaubens bedrängt, verfolgt und vertrieben. Religiöse Konflikte vermischen sich oftmals mit sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Spannungen. Wir treten international für Presse- und Meinungsfreiheit als wesentliches Fundament einer freiheitlichen und demokratischen Gesellschaft ein. Wir stützen und schützen mutige Menschenrechtsverteidiger und fördern zivilgesellschaftliche Kräfte, die unsere Hilfe brauchen.” See *Deutschlands Zukunft Gestalten. Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD für die 18. Legislaturperiode*, Berlin, 2013, S. 179, accessed December 29, 2013, <https://www.cdu.de/sites/default/files/media/dokumente/koalitionsvertrag.pdf>.

## ADVOCATING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND FREEDOM AS GRAVE DUTY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Religious leaders have a high responsibility to promote religious liberty and freedom by presenting their teaching “without allowing themselves to be conditioned by personal, political or social interests, and in ways that conform to the requirements of peaceful coexistence and respect for the freedom of each individual.”<sup>90</sup> This entails for religious leaders and institution a “Yes” to pluralism and competition in spiritual matters, as “religious communities must learn to retain their adherents and to gain new members by peaceful competition, by better teaching and preaching, not by private or state coercion.”<sup>91</sup> Religious liberty and freedom entails the crucial and grave right to change one’s religion or to choose none at all. The recognition of religious liberty by the Catholic Church as of one of the biggest religious communities increased the chance for a life in human dignity for many.<sup>92</sup> Pope Francis urges a “mobilization of consciences” to protect people persecuted because of their faith. On his visit to Turkey in November 2014 he begged Muslim leaders in politics, religious and academic life, to condemn Islamist terror carried out in the name of Islam, because this terror in the name of God damages Islam and religion in general. Pope Francis does not tire to call for “solidarity of all believers”:

As religious leaders, we are obliged to denounce all violations against human dignity and human rights. Human life, a gift of God the Creator, possesses a sacred character. As such, any violence which seeks religious justification warrants the strongest condemnation because the Omnipotent is the God of life and peace. The world expects those who claim to adore God to be men and women of peace who are capable of living as brothers and sisters, regardless of ethnic, religious, cultural or ideological differences. As well as denouncing such violations, we must also work together to find adequate solutions. This requires the cooperation of all:

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<sup>90</sup> John Paul II, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1988: Religious Freedom: Condition for Peace, Vatican, December 8, 1987, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-li\\_mes\\_19871208\\_xxi-world-day-for-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-li_mes_19871208_xxi-world-day-for-peace.html).

<sup>91</sup> Farr, “International Religious Freedom and Moral Responsibility”, 197.

<sup>92</sup> “Der kulturelle und religiöse Pluralismus [...] lässt sich nur bewältigen, wenn der moderne Pluralismus nicht nur als eine unvermeidliche Tatsache oder vorübergehendes Übel, sondern als Wertidee betrachtet und entwickelt wird. Exemplarisch lässt sich dies meines Erachtens an dem umwälzenden Schritt verdeutlichen, den die katholische Kirche mit der Anerkennung der Religionsfreiheit und damit des Pluralismus als Wert vollzogen hat. Wie sich zeigen lässt, hat die Tatsache, dass eine der großen religiösen Traditionen, die bis weit in das 20. Jahrhundert hinein den Pluralismus nur zähneknirschend duldeten, zur Religionsfreiheit gefunden hat, die Chancen für ein humanes Zusammenleben weltweit erhöht.” Karl Gabriel, “Fragmentierte Gesellschaft und die Suche nach humanem Zusammenleben,” in *Fragmentierte Gesellschaft – Einheit der Bildung*, ed. Gerhard Mertens, Münstersche Gespräche zur Pädagogik 23 (Münster, Aschendorff: 2007), 11-23, here 18.

governments, political and religious leaders, representatives of civil society, and all men and women of goodwill.<sup>93</sup>

For this religious leaders have to work better globally together to promote justice and the common good. Spiritual treasures and resources have to be used in a positive way to promote mutual understanding and peace:

We, Muslims and Christians, are the bearers of spiritual treasures of inestimable worth. Among these we recognize some shared elements, though lived according to the traditions of each, such as the adoration of the All-Merciful God, reference to the Patriarch Abraham, prayer, almsgiving, fasting...elements which, when lived sincerely, can transform life and provide a sure foundation for dignity and fraternity. Recognizing and developing our common spiritual heritage – through interreligious dialogue – helps us to promote and to uphold moral values, peace and freedom in society (cf. John Paul II, Address to the Catholic Community in Ankara, 29 November 1979).<sup>94</sup>

Genuine and honest dialogue can pave the way to lasting peace, so Pope Francis. “Freedom of religion and freedom of expression, when truly guaranteed to each person, will help friendship to flourish and thus become an eloquent sign of peace.”<sup>95</sup>

Interreligious and intercultural dialogue is indispensable to end fundamentalism and terrorism. The question is “whether people of faith will stand up and speak now, or will they sit in silence.”<sup>96</sup> Courage is a main virtue in this challenging time. “

Do the public authorities confidently and without cowering perform their duty? Does the spectacular headline occasion a reaffirmation among religious leaders of their commitment to religious liberty for everyone?”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Apostolic Journey to Turkey: Meeting with the President of the “Diyamet” at the Department for Religious Affairs (28 November 2014), Address of the Holy Father, Ankara, Friday, 28 November 2014, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141128\\_turchia-presidenza-diyamet.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/november/documents/papa-francesco_20141128_turchia-presidenza-diyamet.html).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Turkey, 28–30 November 2014, Meeting with the President, Prime Minister and Civil Authorities, Address of the Holy Father, Presidential Palace, Ankara, Friday, 28 November 2014, <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/travels/2014/outside/documents/papa-francesco-turchia-2014.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Deborah Castellano Lubov, “The Case for Religious Freedom: Alliance Defending Freedom CEO Speaks on Protecting Christian Rights in the World,” Rome, December 04, 2014, <https://zenit.org/articles/the-case-for-religious-freedom/>.

<sup>97</sup> Gerard V. Bradley, “Introduction,” in Gerald V. Bradley (ed.), *Challenges to Religious Liberty in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge et al.: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 193-207, here 202.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND TEACHING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AS ROAD FROM VIOLENCE

Religions and moral and religious education are highly relevant for the generation of values (German: *Wertgenerierung*) in societies and also for their harmony and stability. “Religion in principle offers a great deal to the public culture of a pluralistic democracy.”<sup>98</sup> Also the Document *DH* mentions the importance of Religious Education for a proper understanding of Religious Freedom.<sup>99</sup> Generally in education (*Bildung*) religion plays an important role, thus, religious education should not be neglected to the detriment of people and societies.<sup>100</sup> A sound moral and religious education and formation is indispensable to promote mutual understanding and to avoid confrontations and conflicts and to build a peaceful and harmonious development. Moral and Religious Education must include the teaching of religious liberty and freedom. This also means, that parents and even pupils can say no to religious education, if they want. Parents in Germany “retain the right to have their children opt out of religion classes even when they are members of the religious community on which doctrines the religious instruction is based. Catholic parents may thus decide that their children are not to attend Catholic instruction classes. The law guarantees that not one may be compelled by the State to take part and this optional character ensures that the provision of religious instruction in state schools does not conflict with freedom of religion. Usually, children who opt out of religious instruction are obliged to attend a religiously neutral Ethics class instead.”<sup>101</sup> To provide a responsible form of moral and religious instruction classes in schools states should help parents and pupils in understanding the historical role of religions in developing the current form of societies and also in developing their own individual and communal religious identity.<sup>102</sup>

Religious instruction is one example of the German understanding of ‘positive’ neutrality, by which the State is forbidden to express a preference or dislike for one particular religion or for religion in general but is allowed to accommodate religious people and religious communities who wish to manifest their religious beliefs in public. State religious neutrality in the German sense does not, therefore, entail keeping religion out of the public sphere.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *The Clash Within. Democracy, Religious Violence and India's Future* (Cambridge, London, 2007), Preface XI.

<sup>99</sup> Hünermann, “The Final Weeks of the Council,” 455.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Katja Winkler, “Religionsfreiheit als Sicherheitsrisiko? Kulturalistische und politische Erklärungsversuche sozialer Konflikte des 21. Jahrhunderts,” in Johannes J. Frühbauer, Michael Hörtnner, Anna Noweck (eds.), *Freiheit – Sicherheit – Risiko: Christliche Sozialethik vor neuen Herausforderungen*, Forum Sozialethik 6 (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2009), 139-153, here 149.

<sup>101</sup> Heinrich De Wall, “Religious Education in a Religiously Neutral State: The German Model,” in Myriam Hunter-Henin (ed.), *Law, Religious Freedoms and Education in Europe* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2011), 171-182, here 172.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

As mentioned, the parents' freedom not to believe or to hold a different belief is respected "since parents are always free to decide whether their children should attend. This right to opt out from religious instruction classes is first and foremost vested in the parents but children's rights to religious freedom are not neglected either. Indeed, according to German law, once they have reached the age of religious majority children have the right to decide whether they want to participate in religious instruction. The German model is therefore respectful of pupil's right to freedom of religion."<sup>104</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The quest of human beings for ultimate meaning in life, as expressed in spiritual and religious traditions, is an important factor for people, communities, and societies also in future. In addition, there is the fact of religious extremism and fundamentalism as growing challenges in our contemporary world. One cause of fundamentalism, extremism, and terrorism is a lack of sound moral and religious education in many contemporary cultures and countries. A sound religious education has relevance both for the personal and the societal wellbeing of societies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and must include the teaching of the value and human right of religious liberty and religious freedom. This fundamental right – based on the dignity of human beings – is considered to be *the* cornerstone of all Human Rights and of fulfilling, harmoniously and peaceful societies. People, institutions and NGOs, raising awareness for and the protection of freedom of religion, deserve more support and issues of religious liberty should be studied more thoroughly and widely in political and adjacent sciences. A sound moral and religious education of the next generations can also improve the level of intercultural and interreligious understanding and competence of citizens. It thus contributes significantly towards a reduction of fundamentalism and extremism and helps to build a more peaceful world.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 175.

