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**Religious violence – a question of fear and distrust?**

***Abstract***

*The strongest motives of human action are love and hate. Distrust is the cause of fear and hatred. This trinity establishes a force which silences the voice of reason.*

*Where in the Bible and in the Quran we see calls for violence, which can be understood in isolation from historical contexts as a call to religious violence today?*

*What developments are necessary to overcome religious fears and how religiously motivated violence can be put in its place?*

*Values ​​such as tolerance and respect are powerless against fear and hatred, but tolerance and respect can grow authenticated from the trust in the love of God and based on human experiences of emotional security. This assumes that faith and rationality come together. But that is the task of a comprehensive education, which therefore must be at the beginning of each coping strategy against religious violence. This task we have to face.*

**Key words**: fear, religious terror, violence, education, hate speech

**Text**

The last years showed us how terrifying and brutal religious based violence can be. The “Islamic State” in Iraq and Syria is a remembrance to all of us, never to accept religious violence in our life, not by word nor by action. So – as a first step of prevention against religious violence – we must look on the motivations who leads to religious violence. That´s what this article will do. And at the final words we will have a look on the consequences when we try to answer religious violence, especially in our dialogue with the Islamic population in Europe.

For this we should understand the non-rational forces behind any violence, always under the special motivations for religious violence. A guideline for our understanding how violence may enter religions can be the lecture of Pope Benedict XVI. in Regensburg 2006, where he showed to us that rationality without religion is falling short, but religion without rationality is vulnerable for violence.

1. **The two main motivations for religious violence**
   1. **The emotional factors**

First, we will have a look onto what I call the **“Devils trinity”**, the emotional factors based on human nature.

As we all know and our life experience may show to us, the deepest motors for life is **Love**. And it´s also the most vulnerable virtue in our life. Whenever we fall in love we start trusting into the other without any questions. This opens a wide range of abilities to get violated by the other. Not only in love between man and woman, but also if we look onto the religious people, for example the martyrs. We are vulnerable because in love we stand very solid to another person or our faith. But for our theme other forces are important, not the positive virtue of love, but the opposite virtues which we call vices. These vices are true evil forces, and the **three fundamental vices are fear, hate and distrust**.

**Fear** as the opposite of love is leading us into violence, **hate** gives us reasons for violence, and it will never allow us being murdered for, in total contrary on what love can give us reasons for to go into death. **Distrust** as the third basic vice is the vehicle for human beings to develop fear and hate and find good reason for them.

That´s the **“Devils** **trinity”** which - in a person’s consciousness - might be stronger than God for this person’s behavior. To understand how violence can become a part of religious behavior we have to face the principles of fear, distrust and hate:

**The first vice: Fear**

In Religions **Fear** is used in a doubled meaning:

1. The fear of God and
2. The fear of humans, who bring godlessness into the world

The first, the fear of God, is never connected to fear in the sense of hate, it´s respect for the creator and with it a steadfast basic confidence into Gods will. In the biblical texts, we find a lot of examples for such a fear, like in Noah, Abraham and Isaak, Moses or Jesus on Gethsemane.

So, we must look onto fear in religion, which leads to violence. According to Riemann[[1]](#footnote-1) we speak of **four central elements causing fear**:

* **The first is marginalization:** it´s the experienced discrepancy between universal demand of the own religion and (assumed or real) marginalization in an real existing society. Christians sects show us this fear, and some Islamic groups too.
* **The second is elimination,** that means the insecurity or destabilization of the own identity or religion in a society which is seen as hostile.
* **The third is revenge,** where people feel the necessity to counteract against (real or assumed) defamations like the Mohammad cartoons or the Regensburg lecture of pope Benedict XVI. In 2006.
* **The last of the four elements is the inability** to deal with conflicts (that means the missing of possibilities for an adequate articulation). By this violence is used as a way of articulation because ways of dialogue failed or are unknown (like small children: direct attention on itself by loud crying or destroying things). Especially when communicating is failing because of the distance to the causer or when there is no knowledge of the spoken idiom in the surrounding society (which especially occurs in the situation of asylum seeking persons), fear leads to violence.

**The second vice: distrust**

Distrust is the origin of disrupting society. But if we have a closer look onto it, we can testify four **basic fears**, which in its roots are **based on distrust**. In these four basic fears, based on distrust, we see that all fears of life are manifested in.

These fears are:

• **the Fear of proximity**: it is the result of experiences which may give reasons for loss of personality and dependence. That’s a useful fear if it prevents us from being assimilated in a society or a radical system of thoughts. But as a result of rejecting the integration by misunderstanding it as assimilation the fear of proximity leads to self-determination, outwardly self-confidently and autistic isolation. People in this situation are vulnerable for fundamental influences.

• **the Fear of individuation**. That’s a fear well known in modern states. It´s based on freedom from all socialization in social groups and isolation. In consequence it leads to a search for guidance. People in this stadium are uncritical and naive and easy to be influenced by terrorism. They are only functioning with reduced own will.

• **the Fear of ultimacy**. That´s the basic fear of all men. As we are dedicated to death but able to think about the ending of our life there are some experiences which may give reasons for the fear of ultimacy. Person who feel to be in (modern) slavery or who feel to be imprisoned in the will and acting of others are the most vulnerable group. Therefore, the keyword in modern fundamentalistic Islam is “new colonialism”. The result of this fear is the tendency to risk everything, to an effectful and revolutionary life (e.g. a suicide attack) and the hunger for new experiences.

• and **the Fear of change**. Change needs strong characters who know in which believe system they are based in. When people are missing this basis of worths and faith, then there are experiences which may give reasons for cultivating this fear. Such experiences are e.g. transformation processes and subjective or objective instability in a society (e.g. the migration problem, or better: the missing of answer how to deal with it). This fear leads to the wish for power & control and for simple descriptions of realty with wrong & right, black & white, law & order.

All these fears are creating the emotion of distrust. We can see this in the political crisis of Europe and the United states at the moment.

**The third vice: hate**

**Both together, fear** and **distrust,** produce **hate** as emotional power of acting against the other. If we analyze the reasons behind religious violence, these motivations come to light. This should help exploring ways of counteractions against it.

But the outburst of **religious violence** needs another factor beside the psychological one:

The central factor for turning the **“Devils** **trinity”** of negative human emotions into religious violence is the combination with religious texts and revelations.

* 1. **The justification of Violence by the holy scripts**

Let´s have a look at violence in Christian and Muslim revelation

Obviously we see religious violence first in the Old Testament:

e.g. Destruction of the Midianites (Numeri 31): *So Moses spoke to the people, saying, “Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian to execute the Lord's vengeance on Midian. 4 You shall send a thousand from each of the tribes of Israel to the war.” 5 So there were provided, out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. 6 And Moses sent them to the war, a thousand from each tribe, together with Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, with the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand. 7 They warred against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and killed every male. 8 They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian. And they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword. 9 And the people of Israel took captive the women of Midian and their little ones, and they took as plunder all their cattle, their flocks, and all their goods. 10 All their cities in the places where they lived, and all their encampments, they burned with fire, 11 and took all the spoil and all the plunder, both of man and of beast. 12 Then they brought the captives and the plunder and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the people of Israel, at the camp on the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.13 Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the chiefs of the congregation went to meet them outside the camp. 14 And Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. 15 Moses said to them, “Have you let all the women live? 16 Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord. 17 Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him. 18 But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him keep alive for yourselves.*

And by its cruel actions against humanity the “Islamic State” showed to the world the violent sides in the Quran. But by looking behind we find, that the early surahs ask for the alliance of neighbor tribes (and also Jewish ones). So these surahs (the Meccan surahs) are full of tolerance and acceptance of other religions and believes. Only the later surahs (the Medinan surahs) speak of displacement of religious competitors and their elimination. Here are some examplkes of the median period:

*S 2/256 (revealed in Medina as approx. 91st sure): There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break.*

*S 47/4 (revealed in Medina as approx. 96th sure): So, when you meet (in fight Jihad in Allah's Cause), those who disbelieve smite at their necks till when you have killed and wounded many of them, then bind a bond firmly (on them, i.e. take them as captives). … But those who are killed in the Way of Allah, He will never let their deeds be lost*

*S9/29 (revealed in Medina as approx. 113th sure): Fight against those who (1) believe not in Allah, (2) nor in the Last Day, (3) nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger (4) and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth (i.e. Islam) among the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.*

The central difference between biblical and Quran immanent terror is, that in the Christian theology the violence of the whole First Testament is **not** an order for the future behavior. It is the central interpretation of all theologians, that this orders to violence has been a misuse of Gods own words by the ruling class in Israel, always rejected by the words of the prophets *(e.g. Jesaja 11, 6-9: They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.)*

In Islamic theology the theological view is the contrary: The surahs are in total and by each word (in the original arabic version) an unopposed order of God himself and his unchangeable words are a mission for the future of all Muslims. Due the fact that Medinan surahs are sometimes in contrary to later surah´s of the Meccan time of revelation is answered by the concept of "abrogation". In short it means that only the later Maccan Verses of the Quran are of eternal value, so that all intolerant verses are obligatory for all Muslims. In today’s Islamic theology like in the former times of the 11th century this principle is scrutinized. But the main interpretation still follows this principle of abrogation.

So what can we do to reject violence of religions in today’s world?

1. **Ways of solutions**

By counteracting fear and hate we first have to detect the positive elements of fear. Fears are thereby nothing negative in principle, but for example they let humans surpass themselves. As a consequence, fear can transcend itself and become a motor of engagement. To combat fear opens the way to dialogue, which is the only way to deep grounded peace and cooperation between religions. It´s easy to say: Without dialogue there will be no peace. And dialogue is only possible if we find trustful partners for such a dialogue.

**Concrete Difficulties we find in this process:** At the moment it is very difficult to find such **dialogue partners** in the Muslim communities. Wherever colleagues in universities or in Muslim communities try to establish a dialogue which raises questions about Islamic traditions and Quran citations, they will get isolated and expelled from Muslim leaders in Europe and worldwide. Examples are the journalist Hamed Abdel-Samad, the professors Mouhanad Khorchide of Munster, Ednan Aslan of Vienna, Jamal Malik of Erfurt or Amer Albayati of the initiative of liberal Muslims in Austria. We can testify a widespread **distrust** against all requests about Islamic religiosity in side of the European Islamic Societies.

**BUT we have to testify: No Trust – No dialogue – no peace. So easy it is.**

If dialogue fails, we can try to find other ways for a better understanding between the religions. One is, to **strengthen counter acting forces** against fear and distrust such as courage, trust, hope, faith and love. Our chance with the well-developed educational system in Europe is, that this can be educated in school and practiced by dialogue. The introduction and preserve of religious instructions in our schools can give a strong impact to teach these counter acting forces and at the same time to increase the better knowing about the own religion and the religion of the other. The main condition is, that all religious instructions and its instructors are **qualified by the state authorities** and **well trained in language**, religions and culture also of the country they are teaching in.

Values such as **tolerance and respect** are powerless against fear and hatred, but tolerance and respect can grow authenticated from the trust in the love of God and based on human experience of emotional security. This assumes that **faith and rationality** come together. But that is the task of a comprehensive education, which therefore must be at the beginning of coping with violence. This task we have to face.

1. **What does this mean to the questions of Islam in Europe?**

We need to question critically the ability of Islam to qualify in modern multicultural, secular and democratic societies.

This leads to a break point within Islam: **either** it´s learning of relativization in cultures and a modern advancement **or** Islamic society will adherence to point and comma of the Quran as timeless eternal instruction, what however leads to interpretation as in Salafism and “Islamic State” with Al-Qaida. Will Islam be able to develop itself in European countries?

**That is the question of peace or riots in Europe.**

**And it is the fundamental question of future or decline of Islam in Europe.**

1. **Differentiation is necessary**

Islam is not a monolithic society. It is always linked to the culture it is living in, like Christianity and Catholicism too. Impressively this is stated by the PEW Research Center by its surveys in Islamic cultures: E.g. 76% of all Muslims in Pakistan support the law for death penalty for apostasy – i.e. conversion from Islam to another religion –, but only 8% of the Albanian Muslims[[2]](#footnote-2).

On the other side the Catholic Church does no longer have a fundamental problem with homosexuality, at least not Pope Francis and the majority of the European bishops. But the African bishops in majority reject any positive acceptance of homosexuality. This reflects a cultural rupture between Africa and Europe.

So I evoke the chance we have in Europe to establish a positive integration of Muslims in our societies. It is the chance of dialogue and its preliminary steps of education for Counter acting forces such as courage, confidence, realization, power, hope, faith and love.

1. **Conclusions**

As conclusion of this reflections I´m suggesting a Fife-Point-Proposal for counteracting hate speech and religious violence.

1. **Strengthen** **the Muslims** who are accepting a new understanding of Quran as religious guidance under the priority of humanism and secular democratic laws. The new Austrian law for acceptance of Islamism in Austria[[3]](#footnote-3) faces this problem and gives a best practice example for Europe.
2. **Strengthen** **the integration** of Muslims in Europe by teaching the domestic language and in schools by teaching dialogue and tolerance as basic values of our democratic system. The religious instruction in schools could be a perfect gateway to this dialogue.
3. **Combat all religious terror**, starting with hate speech, on the internet and media, on our streets and in public. There has to be a zero tolerance for hate speech if we are willing to defend and to value our humanistic and democratic convictions (attending Muslim fundamentalists just as right wing Christian fundamentalists).
4. **Combat all political hate speech**, in public, politics and social media. This includes to combat all hate speech and undemocratic attempts of politician’s and political groups in Europe.
5. **Call on all Christians** in our continent, based on 2000 years of Christianity (and struggle for a deeper understanding what Christianity really means), to more daring of Christian values in public. This would strengthen the Christian image as people of faith living together with Muslims – and give a better starting position for a dialogue between religions.

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1. Vgl. Riemann, F. (1978). Grundformen der Angst; Sponsel, R. (2001). Die vier Grundstrukturen nach Fritz Riemann's Grundformen der Angst, Internet Publikation für Allgemeine und Integrative Psychotherapie IP-GIPT. Verfügbar unter www.sgipt.org/gipt/diffpsy/cst/cst0.htm [11.04.2017]. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. PewResearchCenter (2013). The World’s Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society, 55 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bundesgesetz über die äußeren Rechtsverhältnisse islamischer Religionsgesellschaften – Islamgesetz

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