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# THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN PROMOTING RECONCILIATION

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

**Edward J. Alam, Notre Dame Louaize University, Beirut, Lebanon**

***A Little Meditation on the Relation between Genuine Spirituality and Reconciliation: The Reality of Lebanon***

Because the term “spirituality” today has radically varied, sometimes contradictory, meanings, and because the term “reconciliation” is too often used as a complete and autonomous value in and of itself, to speak about the role of spirituality in promoting reconciliation requires a number of important qualifications. First, it is a demonstrable fact that certain “spiritualities” not only do not lead to reconciliation, but promote the destruction of that which is good and beautiful, causing further division, confusion, and perversion. Some “spiritualities”, in denying the innate goodness of the physical and material world, end up in morbid and fruitless violence. Other “spiritualities”, by absolutizing their particular brand of spirituality, tend to be so closed in on themselves that they reject as “evil” any version of spirituality that does not perfectly conform to theirs. Second, “reconciliation” cannot possibly be an autonomous value in and of itself, analogous for instance to say the good, the true, or the beautiful and therefore pursued everywhere and always at all costs. Certain ideas, certain values, and even certain people are by definition irreconcilable, and must be. What does evil, for instance, have to do with the good? What does being have to do with non-being? How can the evil man be reconciled with the just man unless the evil man turns away from his evil and begins to desire what is good and just? Although these qualifications are quite basic and fairly obvious, I believe they need to be said before stating my main claim, namely, that only genuine spirituality can lead to real reconciliation. This paper shall explore, then, the meaning of genuine spirituality, and shall attempt to describe how, in my own country of Lebanon, genuine spirituality does promote, however imperfectly, real reconciliation.

**Constantinos Athanasopoulos**, FHEA, Open University, United Kingdom

***Lessons in Reconciliation between Christianity and Islam in the Discussions of St Gregory Palamas with Ishmael, Chiones and Tasimanes.***

St Gregory Palamas, while travelling from Thessaloniki to Constantinople, he was captured by the Turks in March 1354 and he remained captive till July 1355. He saw his captivity as an opportunity given to him by God to discuss with his captors about the truth of his beliefs. In his letter we have three distinct discussions of this kind: a discussion with Ishmael, the grandson of the local Rule (Emir), on the topic of alms giving; a discussion with Chiones (Muslims with particular beliefs regarding Islam; it is disputed whether they were Alevisites); and a discussion with Tasimanes (a Turkish Imam) comparing Jesus to Muhammad. In these discussions we can see key principles that can guide contemporary discussions between different religious beliefs: humility, honesty, sympathy (applying the principle of charity), use of demonstration and logical argument in the refutation of opposite beliefs. After an initial exposition of these principles as expressed in the discussions of St Gregory Palamas with the Turkish Muslims I will elaborate on the significance of these principles for contemporary practices of reconciliation.

**Osman Bilen**, Dokuz Eylul University, Izmir, Turkey

***Saving Face or Giving Spirit to the Letters: Reconciliation by Inspiring New Meaning and Value into Words***

Dictionary definitions of "reconciliation" include "absence or cessation of war or hostility." Settlement of a quarrel or reaching an agreement means coming to terms with opposite view, or claim. But there also another sense of reconciliation that resonates the old sense of "to honor; to put up with something; to conform to social or spiritual norm, a promise, etc. Therefore, the

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concept of “resolution” implies both a situation of conflict and a desire to restore “status quo ante,” i.e. that points to a situation of calm, quite, order or peace. Therefore any efforts for promoting a reconciliation require us to take into account two different factors: perceptions about the conditions prior to, and expectations about the conditions after the settlement of conflict.

There appears to be various causes of human conflicts as there are many different ways to their resolutions as violence is being the least appropriate but at same time the most prevalent form of actions throughout the world. The root causes of violent conflicts are classified into three levels by the social scientists: Biological or natural instincts, individual motives and social conditions. Natural theories claims that cause of violence is the biological or innate human instincts. Individualistic approach explains the violence as the result of despair that brings out the natural instincts to the surface with supporting social motives. The social theory of violence however finds the root cause of conflict as the social and cultural conditioning of individual. According to this theory, individual learns violence by observing family, friends and cultural images. If aggression is rewarded, they tend to resort to violence; or if non-violence is promoted, aggressive behavior may change.

In the following paper I will argue that spirituality becomes relevant in promoting reconciliation of conflicts, if the term ‘spirit’ is taken in the sense of what lies behind the letters or words. Traditional sense of spiritual often refers one wing of the “body-spirit,” “material-immortal” or sensible-insensible,” even “this world-other world” duality. Promoting peace, quite, tranquility by emphasizing the spiritual values and virtues was the traditional path trodden which leads us nowhere at a post metaphysical age. Instead we should take into account that ‘language’ is the only means of cultural and social conditioning that affects human behavior. It is usually not the conflict between humans that has more permanent effects than 'the conflict with words' that people most often gets into. We should remind ourselves the old adage that “whatever one suffers in life is most probably from his tongue,” that points to this fact. We should bring back the spirit to letter and sound of words in a morally responsible way where peace really means peace. What we need are ethical rules that work in situations of conflict and after reconciliation these same moral rules become the law of human peace and quiet.

**Dan Chițoiu, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch**

***The Practice of Spirituality as Way to Reconcile with the Other***

A particular spiritual practice means deepening of the sense of transcendence, of the self-understanding, but as well the recognition of the other as a neighbor. A sign of authenticity in spiritual practice is the development of empathy with the other, and this due to the growth of capability to be aware that other humans have same needs. In my paper I will discuss what are the distinctive characteristics of what we call *spiritual practice/s* as distinct from religious believes or cultural habits, and why such practices can offer a solid ground for interethnic and interreligious reconciliation.

**Ioan Dura, Ovidius University, Constanța, Romania**

***The Reconciliatory Dimension of Romanian Spirituality in Thinking of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae***

By its geostrategic position, Romanian space marks a confluence of the contact between Western and Eastern culture. From this reason, Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, the most representative Romanian Orthodox theologian (1903-1993) in his book *Reflections on the Spirituality of Romanian People* speaks about “the synthesis of Romanian spirit” in which the identitary traditional elements and heterogeneous ones are combined in a perfect harmony not for exclusion, but to a spiritual content of rich complexity, nuanced and able to achieve in a dynamic balance an integral human synthesis, in the perspective of an intermediation on global scale. In this “the synthesis of Romanian spirit”, Orthodox spirituality, firmly rooted and underlined in the social life, represents a dynamic identity, open to other spiritual identities in shaping a universal and reconciliatory communion. I propose in this presentation to highlight the particularity of the Romanian Orthodox spirituality to be a universal paradigm of religious openness to otherness, by the fact that “the synthesis of Romanian spirit” incorporates basic elements which correspond to the tendencies of human spirit expressed in different religious cultures of the world. Romanian

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people, throughout of its history, in meeting with other religious cultures has proved reconciliation, curiosity, hospitality, and openness to communion by preserving of identity values.

**John Farina**, George Mason University, USA

### ***Religion and Identity***

How does religion shape our social and political identity? How does religious identity conflict with political identity? How do political projects like the European Union conflict with traditional understandings of religious identity? How do conceptions of religious liberty as an individual right of conscience and belief undermine religious identity? These and other questions will be explored in this paper.

**Cornelia Margareta Găspărel**, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

### ***Woman and Reconciliation in Contemporary World Ethos***

Are the autonomy, dignity and gender equality ethical coordinates of women's crossing through this world? Has the woman full personhood? The man is not only man when he is just a coefficient in the gross national product, when he is meaningful in economic terms, says Cardinal Reinhard Marx in one of his recent books, where he reveals a number of issues such as: *the active wo/man in his/her community and his whole being is central to Christian social ethics, and all the forms of economy and society organization can be measured by whether serving or restricting personal dignity and human freedom. According to the unwavering Christian belief this respect for human dignity must be granted to all people, even those who still cannot or can no longer participate in economic activities (The Capital. A Plea for Man)*. A woman's act of reconciliation would require an analysis precisely within this variety of ethical and spiritual cultures of the contemporary world. The relative roles that women have in different societies justify and classify religions and cultures together. Maybe this is one of the great ethical issues of the world in which we live. *Women's World* (Alain Touraine) and *The Capital. A Plea for Man* (Reinhard Marx) are two important works of major ethical analysis

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regarding the role of women in this *Theatrum mundi*. As within the value ethics and of all those sciences devoted to bringing spiritual development, the *ethical meaning of women's life* is emerging - of human in general. The ethical foundation that foregrounds the moral and social scientific thinking reveals the value and dignity granted to woman and her life, on which man builds his near and distant future. A reminiscent view of the women's roles in various societies, during *peacetime* or *war* that extensively explains the thinking of the societies and the moral value granted to women which metamorphoses over time, within the framework of interpretations and theories of knowledge.

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**Rolando Gripaldo**, Editor, *Philosophia*, Quezon City, Philippines

### *The Concept of Spirituality*

The summer seminar speaks of spirituality as "a practice following a particular religious

tradition and aiming for personal and community's betterment." What I intend to do is to provide

a metaphysical understanding of what spirituality really is that could lend itself to the practice in a religious tradition. The work I intend to do will try to reconcile soma, nous, mind, and spirit. In the history of philosophy, the division is simply between the corporeal (soma) and the incorporeal (mind, soul, spirit). This leads to the lumping together of the soul and spirit as identical with the mind. There's a lot of examples of this lumping together in the history of philosophy--from Socrates to the British empiricists, to the German idealists, down the line to Bertrand Russell and a lot of contemporary philosophers of mind. But, I think, this lumping together is an error.

Pope Francis says you do not have to believe in God to be spiritual; all you need to do is to be good (he is referring to the Buddhists and others of similar persuasions). He says that the traditional concept of God is outdated. What I am saying is that "spirituality" has many variants.

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I want to clarify that only that variant where "spirituality" is taken as the practice in following a religious tradition that is the legitimate focus of the seminar.

**Varghese Manimala**, Henry Martin Institute, Hyderabad, India

### *Sacred Seculariy as Spiritualiy*

The title of this paper may appear a little curious, and for some even contradictory especially those who see an opposition between sacred and the secular. The contemporary aspiration does not discard anything, nor despise or eliminate any portion of the real. This *novum* (new approach) does not take refuge in the highest by neglecting the lowest; it does not make a separation by favouring the spiritual and ignoring the material; it does not search out eternity at the expense of temporality. We know that spiritual activity involves contemplation; but here we do not see contemplation as a mere theoretical or intellectual life, disconnected from practical existence and social solidarity. Hence, contemplation includes 'sacred secularity.' We further need to realize that this world (*saeculum*) is sacred and secular moves have transcendent repercussion. According to some religions *kosmos* (cosmos) is the body of God. Christianity, likewise, claims that the *kosmos* is the body of Christ, and qualifies this by saying that this body is still in pangs of birth and on the way to an *eschaton* that will be reached by every realized (liberated) person. This is a cosmotheandric cosmology is what we call together with "Sacred Secularity" (Panikkar). We may also entitle this as a 'cosmotheandric spirituality,' borrowing the words of the famous philosopher-theologian Raimon Panikkar.

'Sacred Secularity,' has to take into the account the triple dimension of existence – *cosmos*, *theos* and *anthropos*. They are intrinsically united, and one cannot be considered at the expense of the other. They mutually complement, and a true spirituality has to take all the three aspects seriously. We shall try at a blending of these aspects, and show how the Sacred Secularity has to be seen as a mission of the contemporary man. Only in this manner true reconciliation is possible.

**Lazar Nikolic**, Belgrade University, Serbia

***Process of reconciliation in the countries of former Yugoslavia - the role of religious communities***

This paper will try to show the role of main religious communities in the countries of former Yugoslavia, namely Serbian Orthodox Church, Catholic Community of Croatia, Islamic Community of Bosnia and Jewish Communities, in the process of reconciliation. It will show that this process started even during the civil wars in Balkans during the 90s and it went on during the first decade of the new millennium. We will see the historical data that will explain main events and characters of this process as well as the worldview and the thinking process that went behind it. It will demonstrate that the conflicts were caused by economic and nationalistic reasons and therefore were not religious wars. Paper will also try to prove that peace building is intrinsic in the religious views and communionship of Abrahamic religions as we show it by explaining the basic philosophy of peace that is present in these religions.

**Noel Sheth, S.J.**, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Mumbai, India

***The Distinctiveness of Buddhist Reconciliation, Based on its Distinctive Spirituality and Philosophy***

In this Paper, I intend to bring out the distinctive features of Buddhist forgiveness and reconciliation, springing from the specific spirituality and the underlying worldview of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism in India and Asia.

Ideally, Buddhist forgiveness and reconciliation is expected to be absolute, complete and universal, including reconciliation with one's enemies, however much they might ill-treat and even torture oneself. In the Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist texts, spiritual motives include reflecting that one's enemy may have been one's loving parents or siblings in previous lives: this is based on the

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Buddhist doctrine of rebirth; because of the doctrine of rebirth, one can realize that one is suffering insult and injury because of one's own evil deeds in previous lives; since, in Theravada, the other is not a substantial soul, but merely a series of momentary aggregates, one cannot hold the aggregates of the succeeding moment to be responsible for what was perpetrated by the aggregates of the previous moment; in Mahayana since there is only One Reality and the so-called plurality of beings is an illusory experience, strictly speaking, there is no perpetrator of insults or injuries, nor is anyone insulted or injured; the Buddhist doctrine of Dependent Co-production implies that all beings are conditioned: once we understand the circumstances (e.g., when one has been victimized by one's parents), on account of which that person has misbehaved, we become empathetic towards that person and forgive and become reconciled with that person. In the Buddhist confession, the prescribed sanction or 'punishment' is restorative rather than retributive: the punishments are meant to reform those who have breached the rules and bring about reconciliation between the victim and the perpetrator. By contrast, in the Christian confession, often enough the penance is just to say the Our Father or Hail Mary: this does not bring about restoration and reconciliation.

The Buddhist scriptural texts also prescribe meditational techniques to help one develop a forgiving and reconciliatory disposition: merely making a good resolution is not enough.

The Paper will also give examples of forgiveness and reconciliation in the Buddhist Scriptural texts, in Buddhist history (e.g., the great Indian King Asoka and the father of the Japanese Buddhist Honen, the founder of the Jodo School), and in the contemporary world (e.g., the Dalai Lama, the Thai Sulak Sivaraksa, the Vietnamese Thich Nhat Hahn and others).

The Paper will conclude with a comparison between Christian and Buddhist forgiveness and reconciliation, bringing out the distinctive characteristics of Christian and Buddhist reconciliation. For instance, Christians forgive because otherwise God will not forgive them; but Theravada does not believe in a Supreme Being, so such a motivation does not exist in Theravada. In Theravada, and much more in Mahayana, the 'person' does not have intrinsic worth (since it is a momentary aggregate or just does not exist), whereas in Christianity the person has intrinsic worth, but in both cases, people are exhorted to forgive and

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become reconciled with the other. The Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation motivates one to forgive and be reconciled, but Christianity does not believe in rebirth. Ideally, a Buddhist should have a stoic attitude of not being perturbed by any offence or injury, so that, in a sense, there is nothing to forgive, for there is no offence taken in the first place!

**Mohamed Ahmed Suleiman**, University of Beni Suef, Egypt

### *Spirituality as Source for Religious Dialogue*

Personally speaking, from my personal experience with the Christian monks and priests in Egypt from different parts of the world, I can say that spirituality is the only and the first key that unify people from different religions and sects all over the world.

To begin with, I had misunderstanding of the Christian religion until the year 2000, because of this, I started to establish relations and to visit many of the Christian monasteries in all Egypt, during this period I knew a lot of Christian religious men that we became friends in a short time, those people had a very high position in the churches and monasteries. At the beginning it was little difficult to understand what I'm doing, because as Muslim, it was little strange for them to see Muslim student who is very interested in Christian theology and medieval Christian philosophy, the relation with those priests and monks grew up quickly and we had a lot of discussions in all fields of knowledge, especially philosophy and theology.

From this experience, I feel very different even in my way of life, everything changed slowly, and I recognized that the only and the shortest way to create divine and permanent world of love and peace, is to establish everything on spirituality and common understanding between people. Spirituality is not to be involved only in one's own religion, but to communicate with other religions and cultures in order to have divine world full of peace and tranquility. From this point of view, I could understand the meaning of spirituality both in Christian and Islamic religion, and I could also establish a religious dialogue between them.

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As a specialist in theology and medieval Christian philosophy, (although I'm Muslim), I can read profoundly the mystical texts and identify with their writers, because without such kind of spirituality which is established upon tolerance and love, we can never attach the aim and accomplish the mission that we receive from God. Briefly, no one can dispense with spirituality or move it aside if we seek to be divine beings not human ones.

**Firoozeh Papan-Matin**, Senior Independent Scholar, USA

### ***The Spiritual Significance of Love in Islam***

The current global narratives on Islam and the muslims are, for the most part, motivated by the threat that Islamic extremist groups pose against the global peace and security. The present discussion, on the other hand, invokes the treatment of love by some of the defining authors of Islam, and their interpretation of the spiritual function of love in creating peace, on the individual and the universal basis.

**Archbishop Teodosie Petrescu**, Ovidius University, Constanța, Romania

### ***Experience in the Authentic Spirituality – Way of communion between people and nations***

Spirituality is defined in Orthodox theology as an experience of communion with God. In a genuine spirituality, communion between man and God is a personal one, in the sense that takes place between man as person and God as Trinity of Persons. And proper for person is to communicate itself to the other. Starting from this idea, I want to highlight the fact that one who assumes a spiritual identity is a man of communion with a wide opening to the other who belongs to different religious cultures. In Dobrogea area, Christians, Muslims and Jews are in a relationship of communion in the social life and this reality can represent a global example for relations between religions.

**Abdul Rashid**, Faculty of Theology, Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science & Technology, Pakistan

***Spirituality is a milestone for reconciliation: Pakistan Experience in a changing World***

As far as spirituality is concern, it is a reality that the spiritual personalities had strived to diagnose the pulse of human being and they achieved milestone by changing the fat of humanity forever and eradicated the chaos.

They guided humanity for the enlightenment of hearts and offer the light which spread far and wide. In the era of material gain when humans are divided and relationship been broken the moral values are lightened only through the torch lit by spiritual personalities leading to reconciliation.

These spiritual personalities have made their mission successful through reconciliation while making it foundation for social reform. They taught about 'Love' to human kind about human kind. Whenever, they went, they overwhelmed the common masses with the love. They offered such deepness and affectionate which turned every grain into sunshine. If the parameters of history are viewed comprehensively, this spiritual ideology has provided the foundation for creating the 'Sense of Freedom'.

If we seek to promote reconciliation amongst the society of today's global village, will be possible by crystal and clear line of action. People in the ruling class and common man would compose jointly such a society jeweled with the qualities of 'Acceptance', 'Tolerance' and 'Peace'.

Now, in Pakistan the campaign for the reconciliation of society has been launched through the teaching of spiritual personalities of this region. Who reformed the society hundred years ago and every person was a symbol of reconciliation. Therefore, in present changing World an exalted message from this seminar would be transmitted to humanity across the globe which need message of this type desperately in present.

As a presenter of seminar, I would like to share my views in above mentioned perspective.

**Anthony Savari Raj**, Manipal University Jaipur, Rajasthan, India.

### ***Cosmic Confidence in Interreligious Spirituality***

The paper will proceed in three parts. In the first part, the paper will summarily present the context and direction of the seminal thinker Raimon Panikkar's interreligious vision, particularly with a focus on his central insight of *Cosmic Confidence*. In the second part, it will indicate a challenge to Panikkar's cosmic confidence in terms of a preferential option for the poor – a spirit, of course, of Liberation Theology, but also that gets reflected in the challenge thrown by another dialogue theologian Paul Knitter. And in the final part, the paper will draw some implications of their mutual dialogue for the issue of pluralism, reconciliation and justice.

**Dan Gabriel Sâmbotin**, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch

### ***Believes and true. Do we have fundaments for a universal true?***

The central problem that we present is to answer to the old question „what is the true?” This question, well known because Pilatus of Pont asked it to Jesus Christ, is the essence epistemology and ontology. Into an Aristo perspective it represents the motive for superpose the ontology to epistemology. In this relation between reality and true it interpose the faiths and believes. In this condition we will analyze how the true is transform in the space of believe and it will try to find answers to the main problems of foundationalism.

**Tone Svetlej**, Merrimack College, Massachusetts, USA

### ***Universal Humanism – Global Spiritual Renaissance grounded on Forgiveness and Reconciliation***

The phenomenon of globalization presents the playground for numerous economic, political, cultural, social, and religious interpretations, which can be benign, malignant, or both with what they emphasize. Even though numerous

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studies analyze unprecedented changes in our societies impacted by globalization, the most important aspect of globalization, however, remains easily the most neglected: the impact globalization has on individuals and his/her human and spiritual development. Caught in the framework of globalization, the individual dwells in the ocean of new choices, possibilities, challenges, positive and negative experiences, faced with unfamiliar shades of how to become who we are supposed to become: more human.

In this paper, I first create new frameworks for a reflection on “human” and “humanism” in the time of globalization. As our intellectual perception of the world is becoming more universal and all-inclusive, so should also our hearts. The heart is the inner most core of being human, to become able to expand in unprecedented dimensions of human existence. In this context, I propose *forgiveness* as the guiding principle of expansion and inclusion, and consequently of becoming more human. If memory helps us to survive, forgetting allows us to go on living. Without the ability to forget and reconcile, man would soon cease to learn, and would live in a perpetual and paralyzing fear of death (Elie Wiesel). The practice of forgetting, and consequently of reconciliation, is the distinctive and complex moment of human existence, when the human agent makes him/herself open and available to the present moment, and lives fully in the present moment. Once doing so, the present moment becomes the space in which s/he can reconcile with his/her past and shape his/her future.

In the second part, I check possible impediments on our way to expansion and inclusion, as well as in our process of forgiveness and reconciliation. Patañjali, in his instructions to yogis talks about *kleshas*, i.e. impediments or afflictions, which are weakening our way of thinking and acting. These *kleshas* include ignorance, ego, attachment, aversion, and the clinging to life. I take these *kleshas* also as afflictions on our way to becoming more human, or as impediments in our process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Finally, I reflect on the human urge to become more human. In our time of globalization, we are challenged to look at this urge from a universal perspective. This urge, bound with an inevitable process of forgiveness and reconciliation, challenges each religion and its dogmatic teaching, and represents the evaluative criterion. The spirituality, or religion, that which

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promulgates and lives forgiveness and reconciliation will automatically excel because it will succeed, without losing its own identity, to integrate and include otherness of the other.