

Insights and Steps On the Way to Peace In the Holy Land

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Preface: How this Peace Initiative Came About

What I noticed most in Jerusalem is this: the Christians have their sanctuary, the Muslims have their sanctuary, only the sanctuary of the Jews, who provided the basis for both the Christian and the Muslim religions, is absent from Jerusalem.

After the destruction of their Temple by the Romans who, sixty years later, razed nearly all of Judea to the ground, Jews never had a single opportunity to reconstruct their great sanctuary. The very first opportunity arose only 1900 years later, in 1967, when Israeli troops conquered Jerusalem. But, out of respect for the sanctuary of the Muslims, built on the site of the old Jewish Temple, the Israeli government did not seize that opportunity.

Nevertheless, over the ages their longing for a New Temple never ceased. Ever since they were driven from their land Jews have wished one another at every farewell “Next year in Jerusalem”, thus expressing their desire for a return to the homeland and for a new Temple in Jerusalem.

The great Jewish sage Maimonides said nearly 900 years ago: not one single generation may fail to work on preparing the reconstruction of the Temple. And until today each generation of Jews has in fact worked on that. Today a so-called “Temple Institute” in Jerusalem has already prepared all the garments and instruments that will be needed, so that the Temple service can begin the moment the Messiah arrives, who will, in the view of most religious Jews, found the New Temple.

My work, which underlies this book, is the outcome of my personal history. I am not Jewish, I am a Catholic theologian – but even though the author of the last book of the Christian Bible states that he saw no Temple in the New Jerusalem, which he beheld descending from Heaven, I can feel the absence of the Temple in today’s Jerusalem as a painful open wound, one that hurts even me, all the more so the Jews, who have longed for a New Temple for nearly 2000 years.

After completing my studies in theology and a Marxist phase, during which I studied history and political science, I went to the US and lived in San Francisco for nearly five years. There I came to realize that all religions are basically one, because all of them are based on the longing of human beings to grasp their relation to the origin and to the final objective of their lives. After that realization I compared the big religions – and I found this in each one of them.

Judaism I knew already from the Bible. I wanted to experience a different culture. So, in order to test my insight, I wanted to find an enlightened Indian master. By coincidence, I ended up with one of the really great Sufi masters of the 20th century, Sheikh Mohammed Osman of Khartoum. With him and with members of his Sufi order I spent a full year, mostly in Cairo; through him I got to know Islam first hand. And in the end, my original insight was fully acknowledged by the Sheikh.

In consequence, I wanted to dedicate my life to helping people who had suffered an existential breakdown caused by their unfulfilled longing for understanding their connection to the wherefrom and whereto. I became a psychotherapist and worked with mainly psychiatric

patients. After a while I wrote a programmatic book with the title: “Resurrection – Before Death. Using Biblical Texts in Psychotherapy.” I wanted to say that my patients needed resurrection here and now and that they would find their new life as soon as they were able to reconnect to their human nature. I have spent over twenty years working on this.

Then came 9/11. I saw it as a great Muslim outcry expressing the fear of not being seen, being left behind, not belonging. That massive outcry of longing for recognition hit me like lightning. Now, so it seemed to me, insight was needed, because the purely power-oriented reactions of the super-powers did not give me the impression that their politicians had understood at all that this violence covered a desperate call for help.

I, too, needed a while until I could see a direction, but one morning I suddenly realized: the Christians have their sanctuary in Jerusalem, the Muslims have their sanctuary there, only the sanctuary of the Jews is still missing in Jerusalem.

The Muslims would certainly be seen as a very welcome enrichment on humanity’s grand journey into its future, if they were to develop the empathy needed to allow Jews to rebuild their Temple – of course without endangering their own sanctuary.

That was when “the Temple-Project” was born, and with that I began my religious, political and therapeutic work of helping to prepare the reconciliation of Muslims with the modern world – which had entered their lives forcefully in the form of the newly implanted State of the Jews. At first Muslims tried to get rid of the alien entity by every possible means. Later, they came to realize that this was not possible. They felt injured by the Jewish intrusion and for that reason unable to consider cooperation, and they suffered from the consequences of their hostility.

My Sufi experience made it possible for me to see that Muslims could find liberation if they directed their attention to the essential core of Islam, to God the most gracious and benevolent. Then a different attitude towards the disturbing new entity, Israel, would become possible, an attitude of reconciliation. It would call for welcoming the Jews into the midst of today’s Muslim world. That welcome they could especially show by welcoming a grand New Jewish Sanctuary next to their own Noble Sanctuary in Jerusalem.

In my mind an idea had already taken shape as to how the New Jewish Temple could be built. Al Aqsa, the grand Muslim sanctuary, would remain unaffected, and still the Temple could be erected at its proper location on top of the Holy Mount – suspended high up in the air by either building a platform above the Muslim “Noble Sanctuary”, al Haram ash Sharif, or even without support from the ground, sustained by some sort of an airship.

In May 2002 I constructed a very primitive model of the version with the platform; I took pictures of it, and began to send those pictures especially to the most famous architects of that time.

I was astounded to get immediate and quite positive responses from practically every single person I had written to. The swiftest reply came from Daniel Libeskind. Less than 15 hours after

I had dropped my letter into a mailbox in Munich I received his email expressing his wish that my idea might gain the needed momentum.¹

The next one to respond was Frank Gehry, saying “I think your proposal for a New Temple is very timely. If I can find a way to help, I would be willing.”²

Similarly, but much later, the architect of Yad Vashem, Moshe Safdie, wrote in a letter, “I am completely sympathetic to your objectives and indeed, in reading through your text, one has a feeling of the Messiah's coming.”³

Even the Muslim architect Zaha Hadid wished me “every success”.⁴

But not only architects replied.

Bill Gates had his foundation respond, saying they appreciated the value of my intent.⁵ Paul Allen wrote “we appreciate your fine intent and your creativity.”⁶

Professor Michael Blumenthal, then director of the architecturally ingenious⁷ Jewish Museum in Berlin, wrote “if realized, it would certainly be a powerful factor to promote understanding and peace.”⁸

Hajo Lanz, then head of the Middle East department of the German Social Democratic Party's Friedrich Ebert Foundation wrote, “your proposal shows a deep understanding of the historical, complex, and today not least religiously founded causes for the continuing conflict situations in the Middle East. The temple-project you describe surely may be called visionary and at the same time revolutionary.”⁹

Ephraim Kishon wrote, “your beautiful Temple-Project hopefully will be realized someday still in the time of the coming generation.”¹⁰

Dr. J. Harold Ellens, editor of a handbook about the destructive force of religion wrote: “There can be no doubt about the fact that the central source of international conflict today is the unresolved violence between the Israeli and Palestinians, which has become the cause célèbre for the violent rise of Islamic Fundamentalism world wide. Unless this matter

¹ May 29, 2002; please see <http://www.temple-project.de/Reactions%20to%20the%20project.htm>

² Emails of June 4 and 8, 2002, see <http://www.temple-project.de/Reactions%20to%20the%20project.htm>

³ Letter of August 10, 2005, *ibid.*

⁴ Email of March 17, 2005, *ibid.*

⁵ Email of June 11, 2002, *ibid.*

⁶ Email of June 17, 2002, *ibid.*

⁷ Designed by Daniel Libeskind

⁸ Letter of August 21, 2003, *ibid.*

⁹ Letter of July 17, 2002, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Letter of June 24, 2004, *ibid.*

is resolved the worldwide conflict will not be resolved because responsible Islam will not be able to win its ideological battle against Islamic Fundamentalists, the only way resolution of the matter will finally come about. Thus your proposal is enormously important. Your project can become the essential symbol and symbolic act necessary (1) to strengthen the hand of responsible Islam in its civil war with its Fundamentalists, (2) to corral the preemptive violence of the hard-line Israeli and thus strengthen the forces for peace and accommodation within Israel by focusing their energy on this constructive effort toward comity, and (3) to undercut American Christian Fundamentalism in its support of bellicose Israelis in an attempt to precipitate the battle of Armageddon and their anticipated return of Christ as Judge. If your project can succeed it will, therefore, enhance the spiritual and material wholesomeness of grace-filled forms of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, for which we shall all rejoice.”¹¹

Senator Edward Kennedy wrote: “I wish you luck in your endeavors. As I continue to closely monitor the situation in the Middle East I will be sure to keep your sentiments in mind. ... Please do not hesitate to contact my office if I can be of service to you in the future.”¹²

Archbishop Desmond M. Tutu wrote: “Thank you for writing to me to share your vision for peace in Palestine and Israel. It is a bold initiative and deserves to succeed.”¹³

At my second journey to Israel in September 2005 I met a Rabbi who right away told me that in his view my idea about the New Temple was complete nonsense, since no Jew who would want to be taken seriously, would think of building a New Temple now. – But, interestingly, he said, he knew of a quite conspicuous passage in the Talmud which up until now had not been explicable to him. Names of people of the days of King Saul and of King David were mentioned there. Rabbis, so the text said, “would count all the letters in the Torah ... [and] they would teach three hundred laws concerning a tower that floats in the air.”¹⁴ Maharsha, a 17th century commentator, understood the floating tower as a reference to the future Temple [then of King Solomon, but why not also of today?] and the three hundred laws as the rules as to how its exact location was to be determined.

As auspicious as all this may have seemed, it soon became clear to me that Muslims would under no circumstances tolerate a Jewish Temple above their Sanctuary. This view was confirmed by an official letter from the highest religious authority in Sunni Islam, the Sheikh of al Azhar in Egypt, Dr. Mohammed Said Tantawi. On October 23 of 2007 he wrote to me (in Arabic):

“Your letter relating to the al Aqsa mosque and your view, as you call it, of the central problem of the Middle East, has reached us.

¹¹ Letter of August 6, 2004, ibd.

¹² Letter of November 5, 2004, ibd.

¹³ Fax of November 11, 2004, ibd.

¹⁴ Talmud Ein Dorshin, Chapter two, Chagiga, 15B, end of page, line 37-39

1. We thank you for your contribution intending to reach peace in the world and in the Middle East.
2. The Muslims cannot accept to share a mosque with anyone, much less that it touches the al Aqsa mosque, which holds a holy position for Muslims worldwide.”¹⁵

At the same time the highly respected Chief Rabbi of Haifa, Shear Yashuv Cohen, gave me to understand in no uncertain terms that only the Messiah will bring the New Temple. But, so he said, he could of course not be certain that the coming of the Messiah was not already heralded by my initiative.¹⁶

It was definitely clear to me now that I had come to a border which at present time could not be crossed, either on the Muslim or on the Jewish side.

Regarding the most common objection of Muslims, the proposed position of the New Temple obstructed the view to the sky, I looked now for locations which would not obstruct any view – and for locations which would also meet the requirements for a New Temple stated in Halachic teachings. A New Temple so I was told, had to be erected on the foundations of the previous Temples. And the site would also have to meet certain astronomical conditions. If these astronomical terms were correct – so I concluded after intense discussions with a Jewish Rabbi¹⁷ who seemed to know a lot about Halacha and about astronomy – at least part of the foundation walls would have to be unearthed and transferred to the new location, so the New Temple could be built on the foundations of the old ones. The Rabbi discussed the matter with friends in Israel who had connections to the newly (unofficially) reinstalled Sanhedrin. Both sites, so the answer he got from Israel, the one in between the Holy Sepulcher and the Dome of the Rock as well as the one on Mount Zion were suitable from an astronomical point of view. And the Temple could indeed be built on transferred foundations.

But of course, even if this information were correct, it was clear that nothing could be done now.

I therefore refocused my work; I searched for Biblical facts and moral principles which had to be taken into account under the present-day conditions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The first and foremost example I saw in the Biblical narration of the origin of the name “Israel”.¹⁸ For more information please go to the chapter „To Understand Jacob’s Fight...”

A second perspective I found in a statement by Queen Rania of Jordan, who at a media conference in Abu Dhabi had said that the conflict with the so-called “Islamic State” could not be resolved by military means, it could only be resolved philosophically.

¹⁵ From an official and simultaneously personal letter of October 2006. A copy of the original you will find on page NN.

¹⁶ In a personal talk on February 16, 2010, 6 pm, in Jerusalem, King George Street.

¹⁷ About Easter/Pessach 2011; the Rabbi does not wish to be named

¹⁸ Genesis 32,29.

From my experiences with Sufi Islam I already knew the philosophical solution. It is clearly stated more than once in the Qur'an: God wants plurality, not uniformity. That is also contained in the simple formula that pious Muslims repeat many times every day, invoking God at the onset of any new activity by repeating the words „bismillahirrahmanirrahim“, “in the name of God the most merciful and benevolent.” God, the Most Merciful loves each person individually.

Most clearly, the philosophical solution is expressed in Sura 5,48 of the Qur'an where God reveals that he wanted different groups of people and that they should compete with one another in virtue.

As a psychotherapist I also know about the effect of emotional injury. The process of reconciliation can thus hardly be initiated by the Jews. Jews have been injured in an almost inconceivable way in the Holocaust. And then, after fleeing murderous persecution in Europe they arrived in Palestine, their old biblical homeland – only to be met by military attacks with the clear intent to thwart at any price their resettlement in that land. There can be no question but that Palestinians too have been injured to a very high degree. After the UN divided their country, many were driven off their land and became refugees, and since the occupation of the Palestinian territory by Israel in 1967 Palestinians have been denied their right to self-rule. Still there can be no comparison with the emotional trauma of the Jews. Palestinians are constantly harassed but not existentially threatened. For the Jews of Israel on the other hand the existential threat is still present and even openly stated by nations like Iran and by several terror-groups. Jews will thus hardly be in a position to initiate the process of reconciliation. The initiative for reconciliation must come from the ones who have not been threatened to such an extraordinary degree. The initiative must come from the Muslims.

I am thus trying to reach the one person from whom a substantial glimmer of hope has already come forth, the Jordanian King Abdullah II.

Several years ago King Abdullah's Royal Court under the direction of HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal released a basic message of reconciliation, addressing the Pope and the Christian Churches. In the letter entitled “A Common Word”¹⁹ its authors reach out in dialogue, saying that both Islam and Christianity are based on one common word, which is “love”.

This was a very promising beginning, but in order to start a more comprehensive process of reconciliation King Abdullah would now have to prompt the authors to reword their letter and then to send it out again, this time also to the Jewish rabbis, because the one common word they had been talking about has its origin in the Bible of the Jews.

Real peace, of course, depends essentially on one more condition: the sphere of politics. There, another elementary obstacle to peace needs to be addressed and resolved: it is the dogma of secularism, which has dominated – and distorted – all peace negotiations to date.

¹⁹ Issued in October 2007; please see <http://www.acommonword.com/>

According to the view of the enlightened world, religious motives must be excluded from all political negotiations. Therefore, there is no room for the fact that Jews have a natural relationship to the land in which they resettled. Yet their relationship is ancient and unbroken, because the Bible originated in that land. And the entire age of enlightenment would be unthinkable had it not been seminally preconceived in the enlightened thinking of Biblical sages.

Moreover, Muslim resistance to the Jewish resettlement has always been, at least in part, motivated by religious factors, since Muslims feared, understandably – and today that fear is being repeated over and over again – that the Jewish claim regarding the Temple Mount threatens the Muslim sanctuaries.

The Temple Mount seems to be the symbolic and emotional core of the entire conflict; for this reason it has been excluded from all peace negotiations so far; the most difficult part was set aside to be resolved last. Here, too, is proof of the weight of religion in this conflict, proof that the conflict cannot be solved as long as the religious arguments and the feelings of the people concerned are excluded.

Thus, it is politically correct secularism that has itself delivered proof that exclusively secular political proceedings will not work; in addition, all further political proceedings will – to put it in the language of secularism – need a therapeutic perspective. The emotional level will have to be taken fully into account; justice calls for acknowledgement of the traumas on both sides. Finally, it surely would be wise to include the problem-solving potential of the religions and their experience of thousands of years of initiating and facilitating processes of healing and reconciliation.

With that consideration, we come to the subject matter of this book, which tackles the question of how reconciliation of the seemingly irreconcilable can be attained.

June 10, 2016

Preliminary remark: Today's refugee crisis and the Israel-Palestine conflict

In the midst of today's refugee crisis the lines of the parties are petrified and there is great perplexity. Instead of remaining in that state I recommend focusing on ways to a solution which have not been heeded so far because they are not contained in the scope of political or military means but rather connected to the innermost emotional core of the conflict, the religious identities. From there our way will lead back to a tiny but eminently symbolic site which has again and again induced violent clashes. For the Jews it is their Temple Mount, for the Muslims it is "the Noble Sanctuary", "al Haram ash Sharif", in the city which is holy to all three religions based on Abraham, Jerusalem. Not astoundingly this site has become "the" symbol for the conflict between Muslims and Jews – too hot for our politicians to tackle. But for exactly that reason our politicians remain unable to see the potential that site holds, namely the religions' expertise in reconciliation, and that this potential by far outweighs the potential of conflict – once it will be allowed to take effect.

In mainstream thinking everybody seems clueless regarding the conflict around Syria.

The front lines have become incalculably complicated – with Iran, Saudi-Arabia, the IS, the Kurds, the Turks, Russia, the US and other parties involved. Thus nobody seems to take into consideration that the present conflict has evolved in a zig-zag line of several stages out of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that the existence of Israel has contributed to an extreme buildup of frustration in many Muslims with the West – since Israel seemed to have been implanted as an alien element into the midst of the Muslim heartland.

The endless frustration over that conflict and its context prompted Muslim extremists to attack, on September 11 of 2001, the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the symbols of Western power. And that again has led to the wars of the US and many parts of the Western world in Afghanistan and in Iraq, which in turn have brought forth the "Islamic State" whose actions are now shaking up our world.

Considering these correlations it does not seem helpful to look exclusively at the present events. In order to find a solution it would be better to include the very beginnings of the conflict, the conflict of the Muslim world against the Jewish State, because that conflict already boils down to the question whether it might be possible to principally accept diversity, which is also the key question in the conflict about Syria.

On the following pages I will try to show how that could be translated into politics.

(April 26, 2016)

Why did the Imam of Al Azhar visit the Pope?

How principles of religion can contribute to peace in the Middle East

There is turmoil throughout much of the Middle East, with the danger posed by the so-called “Islamic State” severely aggravating the effects of the old rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

While some Arab States are trying to improve their relations with Israel in order to strengthen their power against Iran, the degree of hatred between at least part of the population of Palestine and part of the population of Israel is visibly on the increase. The Two State Solution, which seemed so close twenty years ago, now appears to be almost unattainable.

Meanwhile, outside the Muslim world Islam is being increasingly identified with terrorism.

This may be one of the reasons why the Imam of the Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo, who is considered to be the most highly respected authority in the world of Sunni Islam, recently visited the Pope. Pope Francis I is known to be a man of peace. The Imam may perhaps have had in mind a very significant incident involving the Catholic Church: over fifty years ago, at the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church admitted its historic guilt in regard to anti-Semitism and relations with the Jews.

After that admission of guilt, the relationship between Judaism and the Catholic Church improved substantially, it even normalized.

But how to normalize relations between Judaism and Islam?

As long as Muslims refuse to recognize Israel as the homeland for the Jews, this seems impossible. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) may have to take a step similar to that which the Catholic Church took in 1965 – but what could motivate them to do so?

Why did the Catholic Church admit its guilt towards the Jews? The Second Vatican Council was an occasion for the Catholic Church to meditate on what it means to be Christian. This enabled them to get back to the essence of Christianity – which is love.

What would happen if Muslims got back to the very essence of Islam?

They would then realize that the essence of Islam is mercy, and that the hatred that is tearing the Muslim world apart is essentially un-Islamic.

In my view, much of that hatred originated in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. I see it as due to the fact that, back in 1947, when the UN was about to create a homeland for the Jews, the Muslim world refused to show mercy for a people who had arrived in their midst after being persecuted and killed by the million just for being Jews. Instead of having mercy on them, the Muslim neighbors strove with all their might to prevent the establishment of a new home for the Jews in a land, which is so fraught with meaning for both Jews and Muslims.

It is highly understandable that the implantation of Israel in the midst of traditionally Muslim territory should have aroused hatred among Muslims. The founding of the State of Israel meant a unilateral cancellation of the old contract whereby the Muslim *Umma* extended its protection to Jews. That contract had provided inter-religious peace for thirteen hundred years, ever since the Muslims integrated Palestine into the realm of Islam. But now Jews had acted like an alien entity; they had suddenly annulled Islamic law, even in an area most holy to the Muslims. That was very hard to accept for the entire Muslim world. It aroused hatred. – Yet Muslims know full well that hatred is the opposite of mercy. In their everyday life Muslims keep repeating the formula *Bismillâhirrahmânirrahîm*”, “in the name of the Most Merciful, the Most Benevolent.” They act in the name of the Most Merciful. How, then, could they keep failing to act in accordance with a very clear requirement for mercy?

Since Muslims want to find peace, I am convinced that they will, even in this sensitive matter, remember the essence of Islam and abide by it. They will do that, because they owe it to their honor as Muslims. But presently, what is still dominating is their anger at the lack of respect shown by the United Nation when they forced the partition of the land of Palestine upon them. Now, however, the visit of the Imam of al Azhar seems to signify that the Muslim *Umma* is beginning to realize that it owes mercy to the Jews, because the essence of Islam is mercy. The insight is about to spread that today’s Middle East problem began when Muslims refused the Jews mercy, forgetting that their prophet Mohammed is the last prophet in a long succession of Jewish prophets, whom he met in person when he was invited by the Archangel Gabriel to visit Paradise, a journey that set out, significantly, from the very site of the former Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. Since Muslims by their very nature long for peace, they will remember their Jewish heritage and they will look mercifully on the Jews.

Instead of trying to get rid of the Jews’ new home, they will welcome the Jews to that land, which is the Jews’ former homeland, the land where their Temple once stood.

Once Muslims are able to welcome the Jews in that land, they will have recovered the essence of Islam, which is mercy, and in so doing they will regain their ability to live in peace. By magnanimously permitting a new homeland for the Jews, they will also find tolerance for the different expressions of the religion of Islam. Thus, Muslims will also find peace among themselves.

As long as the Muslims remain unable to welcome the Jews in their ancient homeland, they will also remain unable to find peace among themselves. For Muslims, peace will be possible only once their actions are guided by the essence of Islam, which is mercy.

There is a view, very widespread today, which diverts the Muslim's and the world's attention from the essence of Islam. Many regard the Palestinians as victims of the "colonizing" power of Israel. This implies that the State of Israel should have never been established and peace will be possible only after Israel has been dissolved or, in a milder form, after Israel has returned within its 1967 borders. In this view, the 1967 war made victims of the Palestinians and the onus is entirely upon Israel to make peace. As long as Israel continues to occupy territories gained by conquest it is victimizing the Palestinians. Victims are not bound by ethical rules. They are not only allowed, they are obliged to use whatever means they can to get rid of the occupying power – even if this results in decades of severe hardship and disadvantages for themselves.

In this view it is entirely up to the Israelis to liberate the victims.

But what if the Israelis have a matching view, seeing themselves too as victims? What if they are able to focus solely on their need for safety, while being unable to feel empathy for their "enemy"?

That apparently leaves no way out either for Palestinians or for Israelis.

That being the case, both can only strive to garner sympathy for their cause in order to motivate the politicians of the major powers to support them.

This, it seems, is what we are experiencing now. There is much sympathy, even in Israel, for the technically and militarily weaker Palestinians, who are perceived as innocent victims.

But would Israel, even if it wanted to, really be able to make peace?

There have been attempts when Rabin was Prime Minister, when Barak was Prime Minister, and when Olmert was Prime Minister. But none of these attempts brought about peace, because the Palestinians at no point felt able to acknowledge Israel as the homeland for the Jews even though both the League of Nations and the United Nations had clearly aimed at precisely that. In part that aim has become a reality, Israel exists,

but how could Jews really live in peace as long as they cannot not be sure of control over their homeland?

On the other hand, Israel too has humane obligations. Following the essence of its covenant with God it must also, for instance, show empathy for the feelings of Muslims and their fears regarding their “Noble Sanctuary”, al Haram ash Sharif.

Empathy will even enable Israel to acknowledge that its very existence means a breach of an essential Islamic law, one which had provided inter-religious peace for nearly fourteen centuries. That law demanded of Jews living inside the huge realm of Islam that they accept the status of “dhimmis”, protégés of the Muslims – a status that was cancelled by the Jews when the State of Israel was founded. Empathy calls for thankfulness for so many centuries of protection and peace and even entails some kind of apology for discontinuing recourse to the protective service of the Muslims.

Above that, the Biblical narration of the origin of the name “Israel” not only suggests that Jews should show the highest respect for their Muslim brothers and sisters, it also suggests rich repayments for the land taken by the Jews.

These expressions of empathy will be necessary if true peace is to be attained. True peace means full reconciliation.

But reconciliation also demands that one decisive step to be taken by the Palestinians. Reconciliation will not be possible as long as the Palestinians continue to claim victim status. It will be possible only if they choose to see themselves as free to enter into the “competition in virtue” with the Jews which the Qur’an demands in Sura 5,48.

Peace will be possible only if not only Palestinians but the entire Muslim *Umma* sees itself as free to abide by the essence of Islam, which is mercy. Peace will be possible only once the Muslim *Umma* has welcomed the Jews in Israel, the new homeland of the Jews.

Since true reconciliation calls for changes in the self-perception of both sides, both sides will have to get back to the essence of their respective religious traditions, as the Catholic Church did in 1965. This means both will have to reach out to the other and respect and welcome the best of that other in true reconciliation. It will then become easy to negotiate peace terms acceptable to all parties involved, including the Palestinians.

(July 4, 2016)

Dec. 13, 2015 Email: Dear Ambassador Shapiro,

Since 9/11 I, a Catholic theologian and psychotherapist, have been studying the peace process in the Holy Land, as well as scanning the historical background from the days of the Bible, the Roman, Christian, and Muslim periods, the Zionist project and developments during the 20th century. All of this I have discussed with high level scholars, religious leaders, and politicians of the region.

In my view, all American backed attempts to find a solution suffer from an ideological impairment, the limitations imposed by secularism. As long as only material values are taken into consideration people in Israel will not enjoy peace. Disturbances like those which broke out during the Jewish New Year 5776 will recur and intensify until either President Obama or his successor says "stop!"

I am convinced that analysis will then identify facts similar to those I found in the course of my research.

Please see some of the results of these studies appended.

I look forward to comments or questions.

Respectfully yours - Gottfried Hutter

Dec. 16, 2015 regular mail: Dear Mr. President Rivlin,

What I hear about your work gives me great hope that you may like the ice-breaking spirit of my peace initiative.

Since 9/11 I, a Catholic theologian and psychotherapist, have been studying the peace process in the Holy Land, as well as scanning the historical background covering Biblical times, the Roman, Christian, and Muslim periods, the Zionist project and 20th century developments. All of this I have discussed with high level scholars, religious leaders, and politicians throughout the region.

I became aware that the strictly secular approach which has been followed up to the present day cannot bring about peace, because it takes into account neither the weight of Israel's history nor the religious feelings of Muslims.

It is, then, a great honor and pleasure to invite you to acquaint yourself with this rather unusual approach using inter-religious elements as a catalyst - an approach that does not call into question any of the successes attained in past negotiations, but only adds helpful proposals for a future *modus operandi*.

I would be most honored if we could discuss details at your office in Jerusalem.

Yours respectfully - Gottfried Hutter

How a changed American Middle East policy could become the key to future world peace

Let's be honest, over the past 70 years or so the American Middle East policy has not been very successful, it has – if anything – proved largely counterproductive:

Examples include installing the Shah in Iran; then not seeing the Iranian revolution coming; using Wahhabis to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, thus paving the way for the Taliban and Al Qaeda; removing the Sunni dictator of Iraq, only to create a new and powerful ally for Iran and, simultaneously, the new enemy, Daesh; jettisoning another dictator only to create a Muslim brotherhood State in Egypt; fighting the neighboring dictator only to create chaos in Libya; promising to get rid of a fourth dictator in Syria if he used chemical weapons, but instead, after he had used them, leaving the field open to the Russians; and recently, after major turmoil at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the Secretary of State attributing this to the Israeli settlements, completely ignoring its religious connotations.

The secularist view of Western politicians has its undeniable merits, neutralizing irrationality embedded in views which are dependent on beliefs of people in certain locations and times and at certain stages of cultural development. But today the secularist view is in itself in danger of becoming an irrational dogma. Building the policy of the most powerful nation on earth exclusively on a purely material-oriented ideology, inevitably fails to take adequate account of very potent religious factors. A new course needs to be set. Meanwhile, the American government has its religious advisors. So it is to be hoped that the immense significance of the central holy site in Jerusalem, the Temple Mount of the Jews, “the Noble Sanctuary” of the Muslims, will be acknowledged. Presently, Western politicians act as if the conflicts in the Middle East were entirely unrelated to religion. In this respect, politicians seem to be persistently in denial, refusing to look reality in the eye. Paradoxically, by excluding everything religious from their view, they themselves are behaving like religious fundamentalists. That said, the presence of religious advisors in the service of the American government gives hope that religion, the most significant feature in the lives of a quarter of the world's population (the Muslims), will soon come to be recognized as a major motivating force, and that the incomparable spiritual significance of Judaism, which is one of the major sources of Western civilization, and which is indissolubly connected with the site of their former Temple will not be ignored any longer.

Once religious factors have been taken into proper account, the entire Middle East policy could run differently. And successfully.

Since 9/11 I have been studying religious influences in the Middle East, especially in regard to Israel.

I have noticed how politicians have skirted around dealing with the most contested site, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Why? Because to tackle it would have called their entire secular ideology into question. It would have shown that there are limits to the applicability of international law, which, so far, has made no provisions for any concept of “religious rights”.

One outcome of my studies was the realization that the Temple Mount constitutes a key challenge for both international politics and international law. To find a solution to this conflict would be to make an evolutionary leap forward for human civilization in its entirety; while failure to resolve it will make for indescribable chaos. Such a failure will simply crystallize what we are now only beginning to witness.

Religious fundamentalists, both Jewish, Christian and Muslim, believe in some kind of a final battle, Armageddon, or *Dabiq* or *al-Amaq*, as Daesh is calling it, before the Messiah (or Mahdi, or Imam) will appear – and pass judgment in favor of one of the three. Obviously none has understood that the Messiah will not decide in favor of one of the three because reality is manifold and the only possible peaceful solution will thus be unity in diversity.

And yet, American secular fundamentalists, the fourth party in the final battle, believe that only they can win.

How can the US get out of that?

Please see seven of the results of my studies, seven basic texts of my peace initiative:

1. The first deals with the question of whether Palestinian politicians are entitled to make peace with Israel – or, in other terms, whether Israel's geographical position and religious relevance demand rather that the Muslim *Umma* be a primary party to peace.
2. The second text is in response to a remark of Queen Rania of Jordan: ISIL, she said, cannot be defeated solely by military means, it must be defeated philosophically. I agree with her and I believe she would agree with my suggestions.
3. The third text gives an overview of small steps both sides (Israel and Muslim scholars and politicians) could take towards reconciliation.
4. The fourth is about the symbolism rich in inspiration for peacemaking contained in the very name "Israel".
5. The fifth provides historical and religious contexts to the present day unrest over al Haram ash Sharif, the Temple Mount. In my view Christians need to express regret for the disrespect their predecessors showed for that site during the period of Christian rule over Jerusalem, 4th-7th century.
6. Sixth, Jews must ask themselves today if the current status quo regarding the Temple Mount truly represents the Jewish position, and how and whether their claims could find worldwide recognition.
7. Seventh, an outline of ideas to tackle and resolve the Middle East Conflict

I believe that if politicians were to take all of this into proper account instead of sweeping it under the carpet, they could not only find quite quickly a way to real peace in the Holy Land but also for bringing peace to current conflicts in the Middle East. Above all, that they would in the process discover some indispensable principles on which any future world government would have to be based.

(Jan. 31, 2016)

Why Palestinian politicians may not be entitled to make peace – why the negotiating process may need to involve the Islamic *Umma*, the community of all Muslims

Since the founding of the State of Israel, sixty-five years ago, it has lived in a constant state of war. If we, from our enlightened Western perspective, look at the attempts to solve the conflict, we can hardly understand why peace could not be achieved until now. In spite of our rational intellect, we tend to ascribe evil intentions to one or even both sides. Strangely enough, it seems to be that very intellect which prevents us from seeing that Israel was established in a world whose people view life quite differently. A person who has grown up in the West can hardly imagine how our fellow human beings, the Muslims of the Middle East, think and feel.

No one has expressed that more clearly than the present Turkish Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, in his formidable, highly philosophical book *Alternative Paradigms*, in which he describes the fundamental difference between the Western and the Muslim view of the world.

Without entering into the metaphysical background of the Islamic paradigm, but applying it to the establishment of the State of Israel, one could simply say: all Muslims – and thus, most Palestinians – are in the service of the community of all Muslims, the *Umma*. Since an alien, non-Islamic entity – Israel – was implanted without their consent on *Umma* territory the *Umma* as a whole could not accept that. In 1948, it reacted militarily. Muslim States wanted to expel the interloper. They did not succeed. Instead, in 1967 Israel went on to occupy the remainder of the Palestinian territories on the West Bank of the Jordan and in Gaza.

In the eyes of the *Umma* the subsequent struggle of the Palestinians is not only regarded as a struggle for national liberation, but also as a religious duty. – This perspective can help us to understand why attacks of the Islamic Hamas have often been executed with so little regard to the consequences for the Palestinian population: all must contribute to the victory of Islam in the fight against this foreign entity named “Israel” which intruded onto sacred *Umma* territory.

In order to resolve the conflict, the major powers of the world wanted to provide the Palestinians with a State of their own. They designed a wonderful peace proposal, the Two State Solution. The entire world seemed to agree. However, despite their unanimity, even after decades of negotiations, an agreement could not be reached. Why?

The wonderful peace proposal did not take into account the paradigm of Islam. This conflict is not a private matter between Israelis and Palestinians. The conflict erupted because, when the State of Israel was implanted, a piece of the *Umma* territory was occupied by non-Muslims and the integrity of the *Umma* territory was ruptured. The *Umma* regarded this as a direct attack, all the more so because it happened near one of the holiest sites of Islam, *al Haram ash Sharif*, “the Noble Sanctuary” of the Muslims in Jerusalem, and because Israel now claims ownership over precisely that piece of land. For, what Muslims call *al Haram ash Sharif* is the location of the Jews’ ancient Temple.

Since the entire Muslim *Umma* is concerned, Palestinian politicians have not the authority to declare the conflict settled after being satisfied with the material outcome of negotiations. That is attested by statements from Iran, the Hezbollah, and Hamas. Even a declaration of the Arab League of 2014 states that Israel’s basic precondition for peace to be recognized as homeland for all Jews must not be fulfilled.

People in the Western hemisphere often cannot understand why it should be so important for Israel to be recognized as the homeland for all Jews. For people who have grown up in the West – and for many secular Israelis as well – it is hard to realize that the present openness of Western democracies can be delusive.

They forget that there was a reason for the assignment by the League of Nations to the United Kingdom to prepare a home for the Jewish people, which led in turn to the UN plan of partition of 1947. Both are based on the assumption that Jews need a State, one place on Earth in which they will be protected from persecution.

In the past, safety was never guaranteed. In times of crisis, Jews were scapegoated especially in European countries. Deadly persecutions broke out again and again. And this could happen even today, as regional recurrences of anti-Semitism show.

In order to be protected even in times of crisis, Jews needed and need a sanctuary, their own State, comprising a Jewish majority. And because of the worldwide risk of persecution, this State needs potentially to provide a homeland for all the world’s Jews.

On the homepage of this peace initiative you will find an article by Professor Sari Nusseibeh, the long-standing President of Al Quds University in Jerusalem – the only contribution by an outside author – *Why Israel cannot be a Jewish State*

(http://www.tempel-projekt.de/Warum%20Israel%20nicht%20ein%20juedischer%20Staat%20sein%20kann%20Nusseibeh%2011_10_02.htm). I translated this article into German and placed it there, because in my view Nusseibeh's reasoning needs to be taken fully into account in any attempt to define the "Jewish" State, because it is necessary to provide built-in guarantees that non-Jewish minorities will be in no danger of any form of persecution.

Both Israelis and Palestinians need peace. But how can it be attained? A return to the time before the State of Israel existed is not possible. The only alternative: the Muslim *Umma* must grant peace to their Jewish brothers and sisters. And that will need a formal reconciliation between Jews and Muslims.

It will, therefore, be not enough merely to include the *Umma* in peace negotiations; the *Umma* must be seen to be Israel's main partner in all negotiations. The problem that was created for the Muslim *Umma* when the State of Israel was founded must be resolved together with the *Umma* – and together with the reparations needed for all material losses Palestinians suffered. Then the *Umma* can welcome Israel in its midst.

As a first step, the Muslim *Umma* must be enabled to recover from the shock they experienced when the State of Israel was founded. Israel must express empathy for that shock – and all of Europe must acknowledge their forefathers' guilt for being the cause behind that shock. Next, Israel must express appreciation for the privilege of protection extended to Jews for so many centuries within the territory of the Muslim *Umma*.

But how was it that this long-lasting peace could turn into war?

The prophet Mohammed accepted the Jews as "people of the book." Nevertheless, wherever Islam became the dominant political power all non-Muslims had to subordinate themselves to Islam. They had to regard themselves as "*Dhimmis*", protégés. They had to pay a special tax, could not serve in the army, and had to accept minor restrictions in their freedom of worship. But this practical solution allowed a peaceful cohabitation over thirteen hundred years!

The founding of the State of Israel broke this ancient peace contract, which is documented in the Muslim *Sharia* law, and – regardless of any claims about land – that led to the intention to eliminate the new and uncooperative entity. But of course, the new Israel could not give itself up. In order to gain security it ended up, after decades of being threatened with annihilation, by occupying the entire territory of Palestine. Therefore, I believe, that occupation can be abolished only once Israel's existence is no longer threatened.

The Palestinians alone will not be able to guarantee safety. Thus, true peace will be possible only once the entire Muslim *Umma* expressly welcomes the Jewish State of Israel in its midst – *an act that entails connection with the very deepest values of Islam*. – The absolute need is for true reconciliation between Muslims and Jews, because then not only armistice will be possible, but true peace. Then the old *Sharia Dhimmi*-rule can be replaced by the Qur’anic command for a competition in virtue (Sura 5,48). And to that all Muslim States will have to place their signature in confirmation on behalf of the *Umma*.

At least part of the present turmoil in the Muslim world seems due to the Muslim *Umma*’s frustration at the persistence of the alien enclave, Israel, within its immediate sphere of interest. This frustration has been greatly aggravated since 1967, because the Israeli victors went well beyond utilizing their undreamed-of gains of territory purely for purposes of military security and ended up creating and perpetuating a state of chronic injustice for the Palestinians and chronic insecurity for all concerned.

While peace treaties have been signed with Egypt and with Jordan, no one seemed able or willing to help the Palestinians in the occupied territories. No one in the Muslim world dared speak and act on behalf of the Muslim *Umma*. One rather hesitant step in this direction has been taken by the Royal Court in Amman: the open letter “One Common Word”, calling for reconciliation between Muslims and Christians: hesitant, because it did not address the Jews.

Considering the terrifying power of the IS, a new and far more forceful attempt is needed now – and there is only one person with the authority throughout the Muslim world to take this initiative, King Abdullah II of Jordan. He could accomplish what I have been talking about, the precondition for true peace: reconciliation between two “peoples of the book”, Muslims and Jews.

And one person can give him essential support, Pope Francis I – especially since the former Israeli President Peres formally requested him (on Sept. 4, 2014) to initiate and head a new institution, the URO, the United Religions Organization.

(Update September 22, 2014)

Islamic compassion – the way to overcome the IS and to make peace with Israel

„Bismillâhirrahmânirrahîm“, “In the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful”! With these words Muslims introduce everything they do. Whatever hypocritical or merciless acts may have followed on this formula throughout history, understood rightly, „bismillâhirrahmânirrahîm“ is authentic Islam!

Rightly, Professor Mouhanad Khorchide of Muenster, Germany, named one of his recent books “Islam is Compassion”.

Recently, too, Rania, the courageous Queen of Jordan, said in Abu Dhabi that, the so-called "Islamic state" cannot be defeated by military might, it can only be defeated philosophically.

Compassion is the philosophy that will defeat the IS. Compassion will accomplish peace throughout the Middle East: peace among Muslims (including IS and Iran) and peace with Israel.

My highly esteemed Islamic teacher, Sheikh Mohammed Osman Abdu El Burhani from Khartoum in Sudan once said: "There is only one true religion and it is not the religion called 'Islam'; it is 'Islam', surrender to God". And I would like to add today, "It is compassion". Compassion overcomes all divisions. And thus compassion is the final religion, the 'Islam' foretold by the Prophet Mohammed in the Qur'an.

Of that Sura 5,48 (5,51) is speaking: "If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues." God wanted diversity. This is stated here clearly. Virtue and compassion are possible and meaningful only in diversity. Thus, the IS' philosophy is un-Islamic. The IS wants to eliminate diversity and squeeze all into uniformity. The Qur'an makes it plain that God did not want that. Thus, all that is needed in order to prevail over the IS philosophically is to return to the Qur'an and to prescribe diversity and competition in virtue.

"In the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful", the Caliph Omar (in the year 16 of the Islamic era, 638 AD) might have handed the Temple Mount in Jerusalem over to the Jews so that they could build a new Temple there.

– Of course, under the conditions demanded by compassion, namely, that “the Night Journey” of the Prophet be properly commemorated in the New Temple.

But if we are to look back in the name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful, we cannot blame anyone. At that time, what we now see would not have been conceivable. Today, however, it is possible!

Today, history can be rewritten in the name of compassion.

In the name of Islamic compassion and diversity it is now possible to change the reality of the entire Middle East by welcoming the people who fled to Palestine long ago, because they were persecuted nearly all over the world and thought they would be safe in their ancient homeland. Back then Palestine was like a huge Jewish refugee camp, and the winners of WW I decreed that Palestine was to become the new Jewish homeland, just as they ordered other huge displacements of peoples after WW I and WW II. Palestinians were not asked, just as other peoples were not asked. There was much injustice then – and it is not possible to return to the status quo ante.

Of course, the Muslim *Umma* felt threatened. They didn’t want the Jews to come. They wanted to drive them back out, but instead these refugees drove many Palestinians off their land. Must the fighting continue forever? If this is not to happen, there has to be a compassionate approach to peace, true Peace – on all sides. And now, amidst utter turmoil, the Muslim *Umma* is on the point of readying itself for peace. It has never lost touch with the essence of Islam. But the presence of the IS is bringing that essence back into sharp focus, extending compassion even to these former Jewish refugees – despite all the horrors thrust upon the Palestinians with their coming. And once compassion has been allowed to set in, the entire *Umma* will welcome the Jews in Palestine. Compassion will even enable them to welcome the State of Israel in their midst as a Jewish state.

And the same acceptance of union in diversity will make for peace among the different strands of Islam, and thus for peace all over the Middle East – and beyond.

All of this may sound like a fairy tale. Theodor Herzl faced exactly the same skeptical response. He replied: It is up to you, if you want, it will not be a fairy tale. Obviously, they wanted.

(Update, April 2, 2015)

Justice for the Palestinians

Justice for the Jews

The question of nationality

My highly respected Jesuit friend, Professor Samir Khalil Samir, who was born in Egypt, believes the declaration of partition of the UN of 1947 did the Palestinians a grave injustice – because it was designed by the Europeans as an instrument for them to correct on the back of the Palestinians a problem they themselves had created by persecuting Jews over the ages.

Professor Samir certainly has a point. His argument does not, however, take into account the fact that after World War I a first time opportunity opened up for the Jews again to inhabit their Biblical homeland – the very first opportunity since the devastating suppression of the Jewish uprising by the Romans in the year 135, which left Judea practically void of people and entailed an edict of the Emperor Hadrian banning Jews from ever returning to inhabit that land.

Still, the injustice to the Palestinians remains. Why should they have been willing to share their land with the Jews? But, in 1947 this was looked upon in a different manner. Even up to the most recent times many international conflicts were “resolved” on the backs of innocent people. When Yugoslavia was dissolved many people were driven from their land. At much the same time as 750.000 Palestinians fled or were forced into exile, millions of Germans were driven from lands inhabited by their ancestors since the Middle Ages. We therefore need first to ask ourselves whether there was a true political alternative to partition. And if not, what could have been done to limit the damage this would entail for the Palestinians?

As I see it, the damage to the Palestinians was not due to the partition declaration itself, because that declaration did not change any property rights; it did not evict anyone; it just gave the land a new name – doubtless, for Palestinians, a rather provocative name: Israel. In my view, the far greater injustice was a consequence of the massive Arab resistance to the establishment of a Jewish State. This led to the 1947/48 war, in which the Arabs tried – unsuccessfully – to eliminate the partition and drive out the Jews. But that attempt led to massive displacements of Palestinians.

Why could the Arab states not agree to the establishment of a homeland for the Jews and why could they not accept the invitation of the UN to play a part in designing its shape?

Had the Arab neighbors participated in the preparation of the UN's declaration of partition, then, perhaps, a solution could have been found, which would have been acceptable for all – and there would not have been any Palestinian refugees.

During the Arab insurrection of 1936 the British appointed a commission to find a way to fulfil their mandate in Palestine. Back then, it was already clear that the country would have to be divided. Thus, the Arab neighbors summoned by the so-called “Peel Commission” showed

considerable sympathy for large-scale population transfers – following the example of the transfer of more than a million Greeks from Turkey to Greece.

Under such circumstances partition could have been designed to have a clear majority of Jews in the territory allocated to the Jews. The UN declaration of partition of 1947 did not entail such a clear majority; then the Arab states categorically refused to accept the idea of a new homeland for the Jews.

The reason for the Arab rejection of the idea resides at least in part in historical contingencies: in the meantime World War II had taken place; the Greek population transfer was no longer present in people's memories. Now the neighbors main concern was that a non-Muslim entity should not be transplanted into their sphere of influence, especially not precisely here in the Biblical homeland of the Jews, directly bordering on their famous ancient sanctuary which had been destroyed nearly two thousand years ago – because the site of the former Jewish Temple had in the meantime become one of the most important Muslim sanctuaries and that seemed now threatened.

In my view the insistence of the League of Nations and then of the UN on establishing in Palestine a new homeland for the Jews came as a severe shock for the self-esteem of the entire Muslim world. After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and, consequently, that of the unity of Muslim territory, this amounted to another heavy trauma. And, since the first trauma could not have been prevented, this one now called for a tremendous “NO”. That, I believe, made it impossible for the Muslim states to collaborate in implementing the declaration of partition; that compelled them to fight against the Jewish partition in the war of 1947/48. And in consequence that led to the military action of the Israelis, whose impact is still shaking up the entire Middle East because it led to the flight of three quarters of a million Palestinians, the “Naqba”, “the catastrophe”. This is the true damage done to the Palestinians by the UN declaration of partition of 1947.

We cannot know what would have happened if the Muslim neighbors had accepted the UN declaration of partition – only that it is possible that an even larger proportion of the Palestinian population would be living today in a State bearing the name of a different people – as is already the case for the 1,3 Million Israeli Palestinians who did not leave their land back then.

The historical development

Even before the end of WW I, when it became clear that the Ottoman Empire, which had led the Muslim world for over 500 years, would not survive, it was also evident that the Jews would need a State of their own, one in which they would be protected from persecution.

And as the victorious nations had to decide after the war how to structure the world in order to ensure future peace, the League of Nations conferred on Britain a mandate to govern Palestine and prepare a new home for the Jews in their Biblical territory.

Initially they obtained an assurance from the guardian of the Holy Sites of Mecca and Medina, Hussein bin Ali, and beyond that a contract between his son Faisal and Chaim Weizmann of

the Zionist Commission, pledging to welcome the Jews in their ancient homeland. The rights of the Palestinian population were to be respected, along with Muslim control over the Holy Sites of Islam in Jerusalem. In return, the Zionist movement would support the establishment and economic development of the great new Arab nation under King Faisal.

As a result of dissension between the French, the British, the Emir of Mecca, and the House of Saud, that plan broke down. The Emir of Mecca was stripped of his power, the Saud family took control of Mecca, and the Saudis were not willing to subscribe to the contracts the British had concluded with their competitors.

For these reasons the British no longer had a clear concept for developing the new Jewish homeland. They wanted to keep all avenues open for themselves, especially in regard to their future relations with the Arabs. Freed from Ottoman rule, Arab nationalism prospered. This in turn led to repeated disturbances between the Arab and the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. In response to these clashes and in the midst of the worst one yet the British convened the Peel Commission in 1936. In order to avoid outright civil war it seemed necessary to divide the country and to create more homogenous areas by means of large-scale population transfers. In 1937 the Jordanian King Abdullah I supported the Peel plan²⁰. Even the Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, who was later to support Hitler's extermination of the Jews, did not in his statement to the Peel Commission categorically exclude population transfers²¹. But, before the commission's plan could be implemented, Hitler's policies led to WW II.

From the outbreak of war, German troops entered many neighboring countries; soon they built concentration camps and shipped Jews from all over Europe into these camps and killed them by the million. Once this became fully known after the war the world was left in a state of shock.

The Holocaust left the newly founded United Nations with no choice. They now had to give effect to the mandate of the League of Nations and to establish the homeland for the Jews in Palestine.

Speedily a Commission was assembled, the UNSCOP, with the task of working out a concrete plan. Naturally, the Arab States were invited to take part, but they refused.

A new homeland for the Jews bordering the location of their ancient Temple, now the site of one of the most important Muslim sanctuaries, was unimaginable for the Muslim neighbors. For this reason it was not the neighbors but other nations, who had to develop the specific proposals for the new homeland for the Jews. In the end they decided to divide the country and to present one part to the Jews. Another part was to become a Palestinian State, while the city of Jerusalem, which is holy to all three religions based on Abraham, was to remain accessible to all of them, and therefore to be administered internationally.

The Jews agreed to the plan, the Arabs rejected it.

²⁰ Mary C. Wilson, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan. Cambridge 1987, p. 122-123.*

²¹ [Palestine Royal Commission Report](#), London. 1937, p.141

The part of the land adjudicated to the Jews did have a Jewish majority, but the numerical proportion was quite limited; as Ben Gurion clearly stated,²² it did not amount to a state in which the Jews could have felt really safe.

The Jews agreed anyway. Some solution would be found. For now it was important that one part of the land was adjudicated to them.

The Arabs rejected the declaration. Already before the plan was adopted they organized resistance against partitioning, first by recruiting volunteer fighters, and then, when the UN-decision became final, they organized a war of the neighboring States against the new State of the Jews.

The Jews themselves were determined not only to defend their share in the land but to create favorable numerical proportions. They started by organizing measures against the Arab resistance. Even before outright war broke out they already fought against the most aggressive Arab villages. They destroyed several of these and forced the residents to flee.

After the Jews had declared their own State the Arab neighbors including Iraq attacked from all sides. Israel was meanwhile armed quite well, mainly supported by the Soviets. They were not only able to withstand the attacks, they drove off their enemies on many frontlines. Simultaneously they fought within their own partition. They destroyed more villages and even parts of cities. The inhabitants were forced to flee; there were even brutal massacres. That was the true catastrophe, the “Naqba”, whose shock is still sitting on the neck of the Palestinians. But it needs to be said that not all of the Palestinian refugees were driven out by force – far from it. Many left voluntarily, following calls over the radio to get out of the way of the Arab troops which promised to eliminate the Jewish partition.

In this the Arab neighbors were not successful. But they occupied parts of the partitions the UN had created until they secured the situation the armistice of 1948 made final. With considerable help from this Arab propaganda, Jews were successful in attaining more favorable numerical proportions, but Jerusalem, including the Jewish quarter, was now occupied by the Jordanians.

All in all the situation was now unsatisfactory for everybody, but Jews could now at least start creating their State. Peace was not in sight. The intention of the Arab neighbors to undo the partitioning of the land and to drive Jews out still prevailed – and to this very day radical groups and Iran still intend to annihilate Israel.

The increasing existential threat against the Jewish homeland finally prompted Israel in 1967 to react with a massive sweeping strike in which the entire area of all partitions was occupied, together with the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula.

Since then, Egypt and Jordan have signed peace contracts with Israel, but for the Palestinians peace is not in sight. The occupation led to massive protests, not only by peaceful means but

²² See Ben Gurion speech in: David Ben Gurion, *In the Battle*, Tel Aviv 1949 (hebr.) pp 255-272

also with two intifadas, which cost many people's lives. Israel reacted by building a gigantic wall and by establishing many checkpoints making life hell for many Palestinians.

Two large-scale international peace initiatives searched for a remedy, the proposal of the Arab League demands that Israel withdraw to the 1967 borders; in exchange, peace would be granted by the Arab neighbors; and then the so-called "Two-State-Solution" of the "Middle East Quartet", the UN, USA, EU and Russia. But neither proposal succeeded. Years of negotiating produced no agreement.

A therapeutic approach is called for

As I see it, peace has not been attained because so far all proposals were designed solely to bring about material justice. Yet both sides are convinced that it is they who are the victims of "the" injustice; thus both sides only feel confirmed in the rightfulness of their own claims. Therefore, I believe, focusing on justice can lead only to a hardening of each side's positions rather than to mutual agreement.

Even dedicated initiatives such as the Catholic Church's "Pax Christi" or the Protestants' "Kairos" Initiative risk endangering the peace process rather than helping it, because their demand for justice tends to strengthen the accusations against the side which is seen as being unjust, in both cases, Israel.

Peace cannot be reached by processes, in which "the evil-doing" of the other side are highlighted (settlements, terror attacks...). Peacemaking calls for a therapeutic process. It calls for empathy, which means understanding the other's traumas. It must then move on to reconciliation. Only after that process is complete can justice be tackled.

If peace is the goal, each side's attention needs to be directed to the injuries the other side has suffered. There must be no new injuries. The process needs to unfold within a protected space, without accusations and without demands; at the most the parties may express wishes.

Both sides need to allow healing.

The conflict has been kept alive by paying attention to only one's own injuries and by denying the injuries of the other side. It is only logical under such circumstances that both sides will react with accusations and counter-accusations, with hatred and with vengefulness.

Only by recognizing the traumas suffered by the other can the potential for reconciliation open up; and with it, a willingness to share. But for as long as the conflict is still raging, if both sides insist upon justice, both will persist in seeing only their own claims and denying the claims of the other. This, I believe, is the reason for today's frustration with the so-called "peace process". There has in fact been no real peace process, only a continuation of hostilities at diplomatic level.

Peacemaking calls for a therapeutic approach, one in which each side's focus is on the injuries of the other side. The view has to be open to awareness of the suffering of the other. That will enable empathy to take hold of people's hearts. Reconciliation then becomes imaginable. And once reconciliation has been attained there will be peace and justice.

Purely political proceedings lack the means for opening up people's awareness and for attaining reconciliation. The religions, on the other hand, are specialized in promoting and obtaining compassion and reconciliation.

The religious traditions of both sides possess many models and prototypes of reconciliation. – At the same time, the conflict is largely based on inter-religious rivalry.

For both reasons, taking full account of the religious perspective will present a chance to make peace. At one and the same time, the dangers of competition between groups can be addressed and the archetypical pathways of the religions can be used to launch the process of reconciliation. Examples, such as the Biblical origin of the name of "Israel", which is based on the resolution of a deadly feud, could prove quite helpful. More about that in the chapters "Small steps both sides could take" and "Jacob's Fight".

The grand proposals of the Middle East Quartet and the Arab League have been on the negotiating table for many years, fruitlessly. It may therefore be appropriate that the members of the groups that devised these proposals should ask themselves why the peace process has come to a standstill. That in turn might enable them to open up as a preliminary to integrating the therapeutic aspect, and to exploiting the potential of the religions for peace. Once the therapeutic and reconciliatory approaches have been integrated into their concept, their proposals will be welcome to both sides.

Justice for the Palestinians must entail reconciliation – the same is true for justice for the Jews. The essential sign of reconciliation attained will be when the Arab neighbors are able to welcome Israel in their midst. As a logical consequence the Muslims themselves will be ready for the next step: reconciliation with their Muslim brothers and competitors.

That in turn will lead to peace throughout the Middle East, and beyond.

After reconciliation

After reconciliation both sides will decide together whether they want a Two State Solution or only one State. And together they will find a solution for Jerusalem.

After reconciliation, they will also want to draw up a balance sheet for the damage inflicted during the conflict. Compensation will be paid for confiscated land and for the land of today's settlements in occupied territories – comparable to the compensation that Germany has been and still is paying for the victims of the Holocaust. But of course there will also be compensation for the losses inflicted by the eviction of Jews from Arab lands.

(May 1, 2016)

Peace in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East

Small steps both sides could take towards reconciliation

*In short: A purely secular approach will not lead to peace * Compassion instead of blaming the other * Jews need to feel the pain of the Muslims * The compassion of the Jews will move the Muslims * With newly awakened compassion Muslims will meet with other Muslim denominations * With Muslim compassion peace will be accomplished throughout the Middle East * The return to the roots of Islam * For 1300 years Jews lived together with Muslims in peace as protégés of the Muslim Umma * The persecution of Jews in the West and the end of the Ottoman Empire led to the State of Israel * A ceremony of reconciliation following the example of their father Jacob will clear the way for peace * Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders can sketch out that course*

A purely secular approach will not lead to peace

Today wide areas of the Middle East are in turmoil, and what I am referring to in the paragraphs that follow may seem far removed from that reality. But on second thoughts you may find yourself reflecting on the very heart of the matter, the conflict which arose when an alien, non-Muslim entity was implanted into the heartland of the Muslim *Umma*: Israel.

Furthermore, neither that nor the suggested steps toward peace fit in with the strictly secular world view which is presented to us by the media and by politicians as the only one to be regarded as realistic. But is not that purely secular world view thoroughly alien to the people of the region? Is it thus not high time that we accept that reality and strive to rediscover and integrate the vast potential for peace of the great Abrahamic traditions of Bible and Qur'an so as to arrive at strategies that make real peace possible? Should not the Christians, too, recommend the Biblical way of reconciliation and not only use the Western secular view which is unable to penetrate to the deepest core of the conflict?

Compassion instead of blaming the other

Up until now, neither of the conflicting parties has seemed really interested in peace. Despite all the suffering, both parties have shown themselves to be mainly concerned with putting the blame for the conflict on the other – or a third party.

Peace will be possible only once both parties will start to take responsibility.

In order to accomplish peace in the Holy Land both sides will need to show compassion.

Dear religious leaders of Jews and Muslims, your followers are listening to your voice. **Please ask your followers to feel the pain of the other side!**

Dear leaders of the Muslims, please ask your followers to exercise courage and magnanimity in the heroic tradition of Islam and **to feel the pain the Jews were experiencing at the time when the League of Nations mandated the British to prepare a new Jewish homeland in Palestine.** To do so would be an invaluable step towards peace.

Persecuted all over Europe long before the Holocaust the Jews dearly needed a place where they could live in safety. And present-day waves of anti-Semitism show that the danger is not over yet – it may never be over. Jews must therefore ask the Muslim *Umma* for understanding, they must ask for a welcome – in their ancient biblical homeland. To express this need would be one important step towards peace on the Jewish side.

Once the Muslims will be able to feel the pain of the Jews, the natural reaction for the Muslim *Umma* will be a compassionate welcome to their Jewish brothers and sisters – “in the name of God, the most Compassionate”, „Bismillâhirrahmânirrahîm“.

Jews need to feel the pain of the Muslims

Parallel to expressing their need for a place where they can live in safety the Jews need to feel the pain the Muslims felt when Jews forcefully settled on land which has once been their Biblical homeland, but which had – for more than a thousand years – been sacred to the Muslim *Umma*. Once the Jews are able to feel that pain, they too will know true compassion. And they will then understand the need to express that realization – in the name of their forefather “Israel”, who, in a magnanimous act of reconciliation, did justice to the calling that came down to him from Abraham.

When the State of Israel came into existence the Jews themselves were too much in turmoil to be able to take full account of the effects on others of their mass movement in search for refuge, but today they are in a position to be able to feel the offense the implantation of the State of Israel meant for the Muslim *Umma*.

The name they have given to their newly established State will remind them of a ceremony of reconciliation, one which thousands of years ago saved the life of their forefather Jacob.

The Bible (Genesis 32,23-33,4) tells us that Jacob received the name “Israel” on the night before, after many years in exile, he met again with his brother Esau. Jacob had to flee into exile because Esau wanted to kill him for having taken by deception the blessing his father had intended for Esau. After more than two decades Esau still intended to kill his brother. For that purpose he awaited Jacob with an armed band of 400 soldiers.

The night before he was to face his brother, Jacob spent in solitude and prayer. And in prayer God confronted Jacob. Anticipating the coming battle with his brother, God involved him in a battle with Himself. The fight grew so intense that Jacob’s hip was dislocated – and thereafter he could walk only with a limp. But, apparently, he also realized how he had to approach his brother.

For that realization God gave Jacob a new name. It was “Israel”, the one who fought with God, and prevailed.

When Jacob approached his brother Esau the next day he bowed down before him seven times.

And Esau was so much moved by this gesture that he forgot about his army. He bent down to his brother, he raised him up, he embraced him, he put his arms around him, and he caressed him.

This is the great Biblical prototype of what needs to happen today between the two brother people, the Jews and the Muslims.

The compassion of the Jews will move the Muslims

As in the Biblical example, the Jews need to show compassion towards the people of the land they occupied.

Their compassion will in turn arouse the compassion of the Muslims and that will enable the Muslim *Umma* to welcome the Jews.

The *Umma* cannot bow to Israel’s military might, but they can surely show mercy towards the Jews – who are still beset by fear for their very existence.

And Islamic compassion will prevail upon Muslims not to force the Jews to subordinate themselves to Muslim superiority; with Islamic compassion Muslims will share their space with the Jews – even in regard to al Haram ash Sharif!

With newly awakened compassion Muslims will meet with other Muslim denominations

And, with the renewal and flowering of Islamic compassion, avenues will open up for meetings between the other Islamic denominations. With Islamic compassion the diverse groups of Muslims will be able to welcome one another as an enrichment instead of perceiving the other as a threat. Muslims will then observe the Qur'anic commandment to compete in virtue (Sura 5,48). And, competing in virtue, each group can share its space with every other Islamic group – once the principle of compassion is restored to the theological supremacy accorded to it by its unique place framing the Qur'an.

With Muslim compassion peace will be accomplished throughout the Middle East

Thus, peace can be attained – peace with Israel, and peace, too, between Sunnis and Shiites and the diverse other groups of Muslims. With Islamic compassion peace becomes a realistic option all over the Middle East.

Dear religious leaders, please opt for peace, making it your choice and your overriding commitment!

If a peaceful coexistence of religions was possible in Al-Andalus and in the Ottoman Empire, and prevails now in Europe after centuries of strife, why should it not be possible in the Muslim States?

With Islamic compassion peace can be accomplished throughout the Middle East. The Muslim Kings can attain that once they make it a concern of their heart.

I very much hope I could discuss this with King Abdullah II of Jordan, with King Mohammed VI of Morocco and with King Salman of Saudi Arabia.

The return to the roots of Islam

Must not the Muslim *Umma*, for its own sake, return to the very essence of Islam, to Islamic compassion? Will not this be the long sought after return to the roots?

With Islamic compassion, peace will again become a realistic option, peace with Israel, and peace within Islam.

For 1300 years Jews lived together with Muslims in peace as protégés of the Muslim *Umma*

And please consider, too: for 1800 years there was no Jewish attempt to resettle the area around Jerusalem. There was simply no opportunity for such a move.

Until the advent of Zionism the Jews could live in peace among Muslims by accepting the status which Islamic law, *Sharia*, provided for them as *Dhimmis*, protégés of the Muslim *Umma*. But as protégés they could not reclaim their ancient Biblical territory as this territory was now in their protectors' possession. And they could not rebuild their ancient sanctuary, the Temple, because the space of their former Temple was now occupied by one of the most holy places of Islam, al Haram ash Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, the Al Aqsa mosque. Bearing this in mind, anyone will understand the hostile attitude of many Muslims towards Israel – even though today this attitude is being articulated clearly only by Iran.

The persecution of Jews in the West and the end of the Ottoman Empire led to the State of Israel

The opportunity for a State of their own opened up when the fall of the Ottoman Empire after WWI created a power vacuum in the area – at a time when the persecution of Jews in Europe had become increasingly unbearable.

In that historical niche the League of Nations mandated the British to prepare a home for the Jewish people and, after the Holocaust and WWII, the United Nations decreed that Palestine should be split and Jews should be given one part of the land thus partitioned. Prepared by Zionist ideas the Jews were now able to take the opportunity and declare their own State.

That, of course the Muslim *Umma* could not accept. *Sharia* law did not permit an independent Jewish State on Muslim territory. Thus the *Umma* saw no choice but to react with war.

Jews, on the other hand, would not and could not give up what they just had gained. On the contrary, in the 1948 war they not only consolidated the State of Israel, but were able to expand its territory – also by driving 750 000 Palestinians from their homes. Repeated Muslim attempts to undo that led in 1967 to defeat and occupation.

That again did nothing to motivate the Muslims to welcome the Jews and much cause for resentment. The enmity of both sides intensified. The two intifadas, which followed later, could not convince the Israelis to grant independence to the Palestinians but only moved their government to build a separating wall against them, thus greatly increasing Palestinian hardship. This, naturally enough, did nothing to make Israel any more welcome to them.

On the other hand Israel is still unwilling to take any risk. Guaranteed safety is their precondition for peace. But how could that ever be obtained?

A ceremony of reconciliation following the example of their father Jacob will clear the way for peace

I believe that only Islamic compassion could grant that safety! So how, then, could Islamic compassion be obtained?

I believe that after the initial recovery of Islamic compassion through feeling the pain of the Jews, Muslims could be greatly enabled to welcome the Jews by a Jewish ceremony of reconciliation, reminiscent of father Israel's reconciliation with his brother.

The leaders of Muslims and Jews can sketch out that course

But in order for that to become possible, dear Muslim leaders, please ask your followers to feel the suffering of the Jews – for that suffering was the motive behind the entire Zionist project.

And then, dear Muslim leaders, please recommend Israel to commemorate its very name and to host a reconciliation ceremony in memory of their father Jacob's return from his exile – even if this event is not mentioned in the Qur'an.

Please rely on the Biblical story which depicts the name "Israel" as a symbol for Israel's capacity for supreme compassion. Please ask Israel to show that compassion today!

Please also recommend this approach to the Majesties of the world of Islam, to King Abdullah of Jordan, to King Mohammed of Morocco, and to King Salman of Saudi Arabia. Please recommend them to feel the pain of the Jews, for it was that which led to the establishment of this alien entity in the midst of the Muslim *Umma*.

Once this pain is fully understood there will be no enemies. There will only be arrangements to be made to relieve all past pain without creating new suffering.

(August 30, 2015)

To Understand Jacob's Fight Means to See Peace Coming

The biblical narration of Jacob's fight (Genesis 32,23-33,4) is quite mysterious. An intercultural and interreligious comparison may help us to understand it.

In many cultures, from the Bushman culture to Shinto religion, from Hinduism to the Quakers accounts are to be found which sound very similar to what the Bible narrates about Jacob's last night by the River Jabbok. In many of these other cultures and cults, such an experience is not an extraordinary or unique event, but either a frequent and unsurprising manifestation or even an exercise or practice, one which is acknowledged to be mind-clearing. In the latter case, such practices are recommended as a means of enhancing physical and mental health.

In all cases, such "exercises" involve spontaneous movement: typically shaking or spontaneous convulsions, sometimes imperceptible, but sometimes even traumatic contortions of the whole body. In these cultures, established experience has shown that by such movements the body frees itself of old burdens: gridlocked attitudes, compulsive mindsets, oppressive ideologies and all kinds of mental deformations.

Such an exercise may last minutes or even hours, depending on the extent to which a person has somaticized anxieties and other mental distortions. It may *feel* like a struggle, because the constraints result from conditioning by outside influences, specific human beings or groups of people, whose influence will somehow be involved in this exercise –without the protagonist necessarily becoming aware of this.

In this light, Jacob's "fight" becomes more readily understandable – and we can better understand both how Jacob could in this struggle shake off all his distress, and how he could suffer such serious injury. Because of the danger of injury, Shinto healers recommend their disciples not to go into this exercise alone. But for Jacob this was no mere exercise. His existence was at stake. And thus he was

not alone but connected to the whole of his world. And the injury which resulted from this process was harmless by comparison with what he would have suffered, had he not been able to attain the final outcome of his ordeal.

In his fight Jacob was finally able to let go of his pride and to empathize completely with his brother, to feel with his entire being Esau's inner affliction, the immense rage that had taken hold of him since the day his father's blessing passed him by and was given to Jacob.

In his tremendous inner struggle Jacob realized that he was in no position to claim he was in the right or obtain acknowledgment of that claim, he must quell his brother's wrath or die by his hand. He must enter into his brother's soul to fully understand his predicament.

Under normal circumstances it should have been for Esau to calm his rage, but Jacob realized that these were no normal circumstances. Esau felt deeply hurt, he was, as today's therapists would say, deeply traumatized – and Jacob was in no position to judge his brother; rather, he needed to judge himself and mend his own attitude of blaming all their problems on his brother.

He was in no position to insist on ethical principles; he could not just go on imputing the fault to his brother, who had never attached great importance to his right of primogeniture. Now, Jacob had to take account of the broader underlying reality, and especially of the injury which had produced the wrath that would kill him within the next few hours – for it was already too late to turn back.

Jacob had to accept hard realities and, setting aside all ethical notions, to present himself to his brother in such way as to heal his trauma in a single instant; more time would not be available, for four hundred soldiers were encamped on the far side of the river, awaiting Esau's orders.

His brother's wrath had to be soothed in one single instant, and that instant must completely offset the injury Esau had suffered when he knew he had missed his father's blessing, while his brother Jacob had received it in his place.

At that moment Esau had suffered a complete breakdown. His highest dreams had been destroyed; he felt as if he had died. This was unbearable. This *murder* must be avenged. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. His brother must not get away with this. It called for blood vengeance – but then Jacob escaped to his uncle in Haran.

For decades Esau had been unable to take action; for decades his anger had been simmering, but now Jacob had returned, now at last, Esau could and would strike him down.

All this, Jacob could see clearly that night.

He had expected a very different homecoming. He had imagined he could soothe his brother's feelings with a rich gift, but he had clearly reckoned without his host. Esau was in no mood to be soothed. He wanted to see blood. He wanted satisfaction for the humiliation he had suffered.

That humiliation Jacob could feel now in his bones. That was why his whole body underwent wild spasms and convulsions. That humiliation was the demon that took hold on Jacob and foretold his death. That at least was how Jacob saw it at the beginning of his inner and outer fight. To him, the entity that shook his whole body uncontrollably was an evil spirit, one he fought for many hours with all his might.

He was caught between thoughts, sentiments and attitudes, those of his brother who wanted to kill him and his own, his firm conviction that he was in the right.

And so, his sense of entitlement battled against the wrath of his brother until, in the morning, it became clear that the issue was not one of entitlement but blessing.

At this point Jacob understood that he had been fighting, not against some evil demon but against God, who had at last led him to this deep insight.

Acknowledging this, Jacob realized that he must give in to reality. He could no longer rely on his theoretical privilege but must soothe his brother's wrath, and to accomplish that, he had only one option.

He must come down from his high horse of being justified; he must face up to his brother's infuriation and acknowledge his power. He must capitulate before his brother. He must prostrate himself before him in such a way as to leave no doubt of his surrender.

Behavioral scientists today might speak of an inhibition against killing, which occurs in fights between members of the same species, when one of the two clearly signifies his defeat. But far more was involved here than a mere inhibition against killing. This was the dissolution of a whole complex of wrath, the sudden restoration of the natural brotherly love.

Jacob's surrender dissolved the knot in Esau's soul. The evil spirit that had dominated him for decades evaporated.

Esau bent down to the brother who lay before him, and raised him to his feet – and only then did he see the injury Jacob had suffered in his all-night struggle. Instead of rage, Esau was now filled with brotherly love. The past had subsided – in an instant. There was nothing he could hold against him, there was only love.

In this love, “mine” and “thine” remained unmixed, but now everything could be settled, and Esau could accept the gift which Jacob had brought for him.

Now Esau could accept the blessing bestowed by their father as belonging to his brother. Now things were good just as they were.

Esau did not need all the land he possessed. He could share it with his brother. Both could live side by side in peace.

Such was the outcome of Jacob's wrestling, and from that day on Jacob bore a new name, “Israel”, “he who fought with God, and prevailed”.

Would it not be beautiful if modern Israel, too, could prevail in like manner?

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Disturbances at the Temple Mount: Christians' historical role and the sacrifice required of Muslims to bring about true peace

The recent and still ongoing troubles in Jerusalem point to the heart of the entire conflict, the location that Muslims call “the Noble Sanctuary”, al Haram ash Sharif. For them, it is the place from which their Prophet ascended into Heaven, proving that he is indeed “the Seal of all Prophets”, for there he met with all prophets who had come before him. For Jews this is the site of their former Temple, a place marked by the special presence of God, which was destroyed by the Romans nearly 2000 years ago.

Western politics with its secular approach cannot do justice to this conflict. The deep emotional dimension is missing.

According to international law Jews have no right to that location, because the destruction of their Temple happened too long ago – nor is the fact that Jews are praying three times a day for a New Temple relevant for international law. It supports the Muslims who demand that Jews refrain from praying at that location; in other words, demanding that Jews divest themselves of any claim to the site.

And since Western politicians stand for secular politics, they agree with the Muslims. But is this truly just? They are in effect demanding that Jews forget their Bible, which is not only the basis of Judaism but has also become the basis of the Christian religion and even that of Islam.

If one is to understand what would be the correct approach today, it will be necessary to understand how the present crisis evolved – and the part Christians played in it.

From the reign of Emperor Constantine, the Christians rule over Jerusalem. In particular, Constantine's mother, Saint Helena, did historical research in the area. She discovered Jesus' grave and even the cross on which he had died, and she discovered the location of his birth in Bethlehem.

She ordered the construction of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem, and she ordered the destruction of the Roman temples which had been built on the site of the former Jewish Temple after the Romans quelled the Jewish uprising in the year 135. But she was not interested in reconstructing the Jewish Temple or in repealing the Edict of Hadrian which banned the Jews from entering their former Holy City or resettling in their former homeland.

She and the Christian authorities seem to have been quite content that the site of the Temple should have been transformed into an expanse of rubble, because this served as a reminder that the Old Covenant, which God had forged with the Jews, was now superseded by the New Covenant between the Son of God and humanity, represented by the Christians.

In consequence, the expanse of rubble came – under Christian rule – to be used as a garbage dump.

That, Jesus surely would not have wanted! He called the Temple “the House of My Father” and his disciples continued to visit the Temple regularly for years after his resurrection – of course with due respect towards that sanctuary! Now this respect was missing.

The fact that the Christians turned this place into a garbage dump some 300 years later, must figure on the account sheet of the Christians, and is continuing to bring forth effects to this day!

If the Christians had displayed the proper respect due to this place, the Muslims would have behaved differently when they conquered Jerusalem! Then it would not have been necessary for Caliph Umar to clean this place up. And if this place had been respected by the Christians the Caliph would not have been able to take possession of it, just as he did not take possession of the Holy Sepulcher. The entire history of the Holy Land would then have developed very differently down to this day! There would probably be no conflict now over the Temple Mount. The three religions whose forefather is Abraham might have shared this place already in the year 638! It would then not have been necessary today to ask this egregious sacrifice of the Muslims – to share their Noble Sanctuary, al Haram ash Sharif, the location of the ascension of their Prophet to Heaven with the Jews who are conscious here of God’s special presence where their Temples once stood.

Yet, if the Muslims were able to make that sacrifice, they would thereby bring peace to the entire Middle East – first peace with Israel, and then peace, too, among themselves, between the different denominations of Islam; for, once the principle of sharing has been introduced, peace will become possible everywhere – just as there is peace in city traffic, because traffic lights rule alternately in favor of one side and then of the other.

(Oct. 20, 2015)

Peace at the Temple Mount – a “*koan*”* to be solved by the Jews

Peace at the Temple Mount – how can it be attained? Muslims obviously mistrust the status quo, which does not allow Jews to pray on the Temple Mount. Thus there are more and more disturbances, especially on the occasion of the Jewish New Year, because of the ever-increasing numbers of Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount, despite that prohibition.

Owing to their dogma of secularism, American politicians have been blind to the religious background. They can only insist on observing the status quo.

Israeli politicians, too, insist on the status quo. The Israeli Chief Rabbinate supports it unreservedly. The Chief Rabbis state clearly that only the Messiah will bring the New Temple – yet more and more people are already thinking about that now. Rabbi Glick is one of them. He urges that Jews be allowed to pray on the Temple Mount. For that reason one Muslim terrorist tried to kill him. But, having recovered after that attack, he is now a candidate for the Knesset in the party of the Prime Minister.

The majority of Israelis still decisively reject the idea – but sentiments change. More and more people are asking what should be the design of a New Temple. What function should it fulfill? Should there be animal sacrifices? – But also, might not the entire world laugh at such an idea?

Reform Jews are quite clear about this: animal sacrifices are a thing of the past. Today's culture is not a pastoral one. Today's sacrifices must be different. Already immediately after the destruction of the Temple the Rabbis made it clear that all future sacrifices were to be immaterial; they would consist in living according to the spirit of the law.

But there is no-one in Judaism today who is able to decree that with divine authority, as did the prophets of old.

Consequently, the question of the [design of the] Temple remains unanswered, yet simultaneously more virulent than ever, as shown by the increasing level of disturbances at the Temple Mount.

Orthodox Jews point to the Messiah, but nobody knows when the Messiah may come – in a thousand years, or tomorrow? Does that mean that Orthodox Jews are not allowed to think about the question of the Temple? As a symbol of the spiritual connectedness of the People of God and God's presence among them the Temple will retain its validity, even necessity, at least in thought, today, as yesterday, and tomorrow.

Could not the present disturbances at the Temple Mount be seen as a natural reminder urging Jews to resolve the questions relating to a New Temple today?

Whatever the case, the status quo cannot be a permanent solution, because it obscures the reality of the Jewish claim. It is thus a clear sign, visible to all: the solution is still missing. The status quo is certainly a sign that for many Jews today the chosen status of their people has become problematic – despite the fact that Jews occupy leading positions in many branches of our civilization. But do the Jews also hold such a position in regard to the spiritual-moral evolution of our species?

The disputes over the future shape of a New Temple might prove to be the catalyst they need if they are to clarify their calling.

The New Temple could be virtually the "*koan**" given to Jews today as an assignment. Their solution to that assignment could be intertwined with the solution to their other assignment of finding a peaceful way to relate to their non-Jewish neighbors. A successful solution would certainly manifest at the Temple Mount, which would then radiate only peace.

(Dec. 3, 2015)

*) In Zen a *koan* is an enigma that can be decoded only where spiritual mastery is present; in other words, the *koan* is given as a challenge in order to evoke spiritual mastery.

Outline of ideas to solve the Middle East Conflict

What follows is a visualization of a goal to be achieved, its implications and its consequences, as though it were already established. At this stage, the goal exists only in the peacemakers' mind, but by building and highlighting models of peaceful coexistence, I hope to energize those models and thus in time endow them with a gravitational pull over minds exhausted by war without end.

Viewing the present chaos in the Middle East one can hardly imagine a peaceful solution.

Yet after the Treaty of Versailles at the end of the First World War, no one could have imagined Franco-German friendship only a few decades later.

What the situation calls for now is a readily understandable concept of such change and politicians who dare to implement its strategy, even if at a first glance it seems impossible to accomplish the goal.

One of the preconditions for a peaceful solution has already been worked out in Oslo.

The urgent need now is for respect, respect for people's feelings. If such respect had been shown after WW I, Germany would have not been ground down so hard, and there would have little chance of a Nazi takeover.

Given respect for people's feelings, even the most difficult issues can be tackled and resolved. After WW II centuries-old German-French enmity was transformed into friendship, and now is the time similarly to transform the conflict which regularly erupts at the Temple Mount, al Haram ash Sharif.

Many Israeli Jews are still traumatized by the Holocaust and by the consequences of a continuous state of war, therefore I believe that the first initiative must come from the Muslim side.

The Muslims have already established a precedent: their famous letter "A Common Word". In 2007 high Muslim dignitaries composed that letter and sent it to the Pope and to other Christian church leaders in order to declare their willingness to discuss religious matters. They could now send a suitably adapted version of that letter to the Jewish Rabbis. King Abdullah of Jordan, whose house issued the original letter, would have to take the initiative.

In order to be able to take responsibility for this and the subsequent steps of so daring a peace initiative King Abdullah would, in my view, have first to consult with King Mohammed of Morocco. Both Kings would then have to invoke the very foundation of Islam, compassion, and reflect upon specific steps to be taken on that basis. Since both Kings trace their roots back to the family of the Prophet, both enjoy the respect of Muslims of all denominations. Their initiative will thus stand a realistic chance of success.

At the very outset, they would have to declare their intention and their willingness to do everything in their power to make peace possible throughout the Middle East.

A grand gesture from Pope Francis could help them: Pope Francis could express regret for the disrespect Christians showed for the site of the former Jewish Temple during the time of their rule, in the fourth to seventh centuries. Back then the Christians turned the site of the former Temple into a garbage dump. Had the Christians shown due respect for the site, Caliph Omar might already have regarded the Temple Mount as “a place holy to all religions of the book.”

Pope Francis’ grand gesture of regret will certainly make it easier for both Kings to reach out to Saudis and Iranians and to win them over for their peace project. Even the “Islamic State” could be invited but the success of the project will not depend on their participation. No coercion in religious matters! On the contrary, the Holy Qur’an, Sura 5,48, calls for a “competition in virtue”.

The very first of a whole string of profound applications of Islamic compassion will be the urgent suggestion of both Kings to all brothers and sisters in the faith of Islam to abolish every hostile inner attitude – at least towards the followers of the “religions of the book” (Jews, Christians and Muslims).

That suggestion should be followed immediately by an urgent and absolute spiritual commitment by the Kings calling on the faithful to develop the divine quality of compassion – – compassion even for the pain of the first Zionists, who could at the time when their movement started see only one way to rescue their people from the imminent danger of extinction: to provide them with territory for a state of their own – in their old Biblical homeland.

Traumatized already in the 19th century, the Zionists were unable to understand how deeply their demand for that new homeland – in the midst of the Muslim *Umma*, the community of all Muslims – was bound to offend Muslims, who had, after all, provided protection to Jews for more than a thousand years – even if this was on condition of accepting *dhimmi*-status, the status of protégés.

By proclaiming the sovereign State of Israel in 1948 that condition was overthrown and an alien, non-Islamic entity was implanted in the heartland of the Muslim *Umma*. For Muslims, the only possible response to such an infringement had to be war.

Today, nearly 70 years later, Jews are able to stand back and comprehend the generous courtesy extended to their forebears during the period of Muslim rule, which in its tolerance went far further than the peace treaty of Westphalia following the 30-Years-War in Europe. Today Jews could show their appreciation by striving for reconciliation on the basis of the program contained in their very name “Israel” which originates in the heaven born solution to a life-threatening conflict, that between brothers Esau and Jacob. Following that brilliant Biblical program the Israeli government could today mold a reconciliatory Act of State and invite and embrace all Muslim nations.

Thus, Muslims would feel esteemed for their historic magnanimity. In consequence they could then, for the first time, expressly welcome the Jews of Israel into their midst – as in Biblical times Esau could welcome his brother Jacob, whom he had set out to kill.

Only then, under the immensely demanding condition of true reconciliation, can the land be shared justly, just as Esau and Jacob could easily divide the land among themselves once they experienced reconciliation. At that juncture today's parties will probably need extensive counseling. Special designated members of both sides may have repeatedly to remind the negotiating partners to resume their deliberate attitude of full compassion for the other side.

Persistence in commitment will enable both sides to maintain respect for the feelings of the others despite decades of enmity and mutual destruction.

During that time both Kings will (together with Saudis, the Iranians and the Israeli army) guarantee peace.

The intra-Islamic conflict which now dominates the entire Middle East may need to be faced with that example before it can be solved. Nevertheless, by continuing to practice Islamic compassion, the Muslims will become a beacon to the world, creating in their hearts and minds the space needed for welcoming varying manifestations of the religion of the Prophet.

That space of the great hearted will enable them to share even the "Noble Sanctuary", al Haram ash Sharif, with the Jews.

That gesture of compassion will mark the completion of the Muslims' quest to return to the roots of Islam. The Prophet expressly recognized the "religions of the book", and he emphasized that, regarded rightly, their difference is not a mistake but an incentive to undertake a "competition in virtue." In such a perspective, peace will not only become possible with Israel but also between the different Muslim denominations.

Steps to be taken internationally:

All nations involved need to realize that peace in the Middle East cannot follow the example of the "peace" after WW I, which was forced upon the defeated parties, but it must follow the example of the peace after WW II, which led to reconciliation between the arch-enemies Germany and France.

In today's Middle East true peace calls for reconciliation between Israel and the Muslim *Umma* – that is all Muslim states, not just Palestine, Jordan and Egypt.

That will be possible only if the religious and the emotional components of the conflict are fully acknowledged; in other words, if the situation is not be interpreted on an exclusively material-oriented basis.

Peace will be found only under conditions broad enough in scope to take account of all parties and all considerations, spiritual as well as political and economic.

The empathy needed for true reconciliation includes understanding for Israel's actions (occupation in 1967, construction of the wall beginning in 2002 etc.), as the nervous, mistrustful reactions of a small people surrounded by enemies and caught up in a state of unending war.

Once Israel has been welcomed by its Muslim neighbors, that fear will evaporate and Israeli reactions will become normal.

Normalization cannot begin with ending of Israel's occupation, its starting point must be an end to threatening this small enclave.

Chancellor Merkel could bear a hand to establish the deep contact needed with King Abdullah of Jordan to enable him to prepare reconciliation.

Chancellor Merkel could promote understanding of one of the main problems with the US-brokered peace negotiations, which were terminated in 2014: the participants. Peace demands inclusion in the peace process not only of the Palestinians but of the entire *Umma* in the peace process. Iran for one, has pointed that out clearly.

Chancellor Merkel could also draw attention to the limitations of the secularist conceptual framework of Western style negotiations and of international law, because in its very common understanding that framework excludes both religious and emotional considerations, even though both correspond to obvious realities.

As far as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is concerned, international law may even have to be amended to make it capable of taking into account both the weight of the history of the people of Israel, who brought forth the Bible, respect for the people in the Muslim world and acknowledgement of the damage they have suffered. In my view, a holistic view of the legal situation must also include the easily accountable and well documented fact that from the time of the destruction of the Jewish Temple by the Romans onwards there was no window of opportunity for Jews to lay their claim to the site. That possibility opened up only when the Ottoman Empire collapsed after WW I, but even then that window could not open fully.

For true peace to be attained today, it will be necessary to clarify the Jewish relation to the Temple Mount, and that will, in my view, make it necessary – in spite of orthodox objections – to repeal the status quo and to allow Jews to pray at the site in an appropriate form.

Repealing the status quo regarding the Temple Mount could also facilitate a positive attitude towards a plurality of denominations within the Muslim *Umma*.

The American government may thus have to rethink and revise its strictly material-oriented, "secular" stand.

The American government could also motivate the Royal House of the Saudis to adopt a policy that allows reconciliation with Israel – one that involves in particular close cooperation with King Abdullah of Jordan.

Similarly, the Russian government could appeal to the government of Iran.

A joint initiative by the American and Russian governments could in the end bring to much of the world the peace it has so long been denied.

(Jan. 16, 2016)

The Settlements – an Opportunity for Peace

According to a very common view in European and American Media the Israeli settlements in the West Bank are an obstacle to peace. For this reason president Obama promised even before he took office to stop all further expansion of the Jewish settlements. Nearly all European governments welcomed this statement.

After it became clear that the Israeli government would not act accordingly the Palestinian leadership threatened to break up all further peace negotiations or even to start a new intifada. Palestinian President Abbas threatened to step down and said he would not be available for another term in office – because if he did not step down, Fatah, the political party of Abbas, would be accused of collaborating with Israel.

Public opinion in the Western hemisphere continued leaning even more towards condemning the Israeli settlements. More and more the media are demanding that Israel, to attain a peace treaty, evacuate the settlements.

The political left of the whole West is united behind this view. They speak of an Apartheid-system, and accuse Israel of trying to shrink Palestine to a few urban centers in order to annex the greater part of the West Bank.

After Obama's demand to stop all expansion of settlements this view gained considerable influence in the Western media.

After a while though Obama stopped speaking about halting any further expansion of the settlements. Journalists were saying: he capitulated before the Israelis. And for a long time nothing has come from the White House to contradict this interpretation. There was only silence. – And even the latest push of Mitchell and Clinton could not change the attitude of the Israeli government.

Unfortunately, not a single one of the Western politicians seems to see the opportunity the settlements are offering – and if any of them could see it, they lack the courage to speak about it.

But in spite of that cluelessness – there never was a greater opportunity to make peace in Palestine, not in spite of, but because of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. That opportunity would be lost, if Israel decided to evacuate the settlements, because it is exactly their existence which provides the opportunity. This opportunity has also not been recognized by any of the Israeli politicians - probably because of the Israeli intention behind the settlements.

Israeli politicians may have intended exactly what the European left is insinuating: to erode the West Bank by reducing Palestine to a few conurbations and to annex the rest. Even though that might have been the motive for building the settlements in the first place, now, since they exist, the settlements offer a real, if unintended, opportunity to make peace – and it would be wise if Israeli politicians, Western politicians, and leftist ideologists forgot about the motives of yesterday; it would be wise to recognize the chance and then grasp it.

The opportunity comes from not evacuating the settlements and it comes from not integrating them into Israel proper, rather the opposite. The opportunity arises from the presence of a Jewish minority on the West Bank.

Just turn all of the West Bank and Gaza, including the Jewish settlements into the new state of Palestine.

Then we get a Palestinian state with a strong Jewish minority and a Jewish state with a Palestinian minority.

The Jewish minority in the new state of Palestine will insist, under all circumstances, that their minority rights must be protected by international treaties. The international community will see to it that these rights are in fact be protected, if necessary by stationing an international strike force in the new state of Palestine.

This will have consequences for the Arab minority in Israel. Their territory will thus not be swapped for the territory of the settlements, as has been suggested, quite the opposite, their rights will now be guaranteed internationally, in parallel to the rights of the Jews in the West Bank. In Israel proper troops will hardly be necessary, but clear and internationally enforceable rules will.

Grabbing this opportunity will create at long last two states with a minority in both of them which will have to be protected by the international community – at least until life there has normalized.

Such a peace would create equal conditions in each of the two states. Israelis and Palestinians could meet at eye level. And that way any grievance could dissolve.

As a consequence the economy in the new state of Palestine will start booming. International investors will come and put their money to work, because now it will be safe to invest. And the Palestinians will rebuild their country in no time. The world will see another economic miracle.

A new economic community will come into existence with Jordan, Egypt and Turkey as additional partners. Iraq will join and it won't be long before Syria shows its wish to take part in it.

Through that neighborly example Lebanon will find a way to deal with its inner conflicts and join the union. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States will follow suit. And finally even Iran will put aside its separatist attitude and ask to become a member.

But all that has one decisive prerequisite. The most important source of the sense of identity needs to be party to this: religion. Simultaneously – or even prior to a political solution it must be an inter-religious, a pan-Abrahamic solution to the inter-religious conflict affecting the Temple Mount.

(March 19, 2010)

Brief Vita

I am a Catholic theologian. I also studied political science, and for five years I lived in the USA where I found spiritual insights into the underlying unity of religions. For these I sought living confirmations. I met a Sufi master, spent a full year with him and in his spiritual community in Cairo, and came to know Islam quite well from this trustworthy source. After that year, I moved to Munich. I started to teach Catholic religion, encountered the mystical branch of Jewish religion, and came to understand and to appreciate Judaism.

I became a psychotherapist and began to work in a psychiatric institution. I wrote down the basic concept of my approach to psychotherapy, “Resurrection – before Death. Using Biblical Texts in Psychotherapy”, published in 1994 by the well-known Kösel publishing house in Munich.

For a long time I took special account of my patients’ religions – and these patients included quite a few Muslims – until 9/11 brought into focus all the experiences I had gained from the three religions that spring from Abraham. At that point, I realized that true peace must encompass al Haram ash Sharif, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. When I gave expression to this insight, I gained enthusiastic support, especially from internationally renowned architects, including Daniel Libeskind – for the idea was then to rebuild the ancient symbol of Jewish integrity, the Jewish Temple, on a platform above al Haram ash Sharif.

I soon came to realize that Muslims would never agree to such a solution, and neither would most Israeli Jews. I therefore sought alternatives, until my ideal of reconciliation between Jews and Muslims was eventually to lead me to the biblical origin of the name “Israel” and “Israel’s” reconciliation with his brother and from there to Sura 5,51 (5,48) in the Qur’an: “If God had so willed, He would have made you a single people, but (His plan is) to test you in what He hath given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues.”

Hitherto, this Qur’anic kind of peaceful coexistence has not occurred to politicians on either side. Yet, could it not accomplish what everyone has been longing for: to unite all factions while simultaneously accepting their differences?

Time Table of the Temple-Project

March 2002: The idea comes up: One Pan-Abrahamic Sanctuary, consisting of a New Temple of the Jews, the Holy Sepulcher of the Christians and the Muslim sanctuaries of al-Haram ash-Sharif

May 2002: Positive reactions from the architects Daniel Libeskind and Frank Gehry

August 2002: First journey to Israel

June 2003: First TV-report about the Temple Project in Germany, BR-alpha Weltzeit

April 2004: Presenting this peace initiative at an advanced training course for teachers of Catholic religion in academic high schools

November 2004: IIFWF Conference in Berlin awarded me with the title “Ambassador of Peace”

April 2005: Presentation of the peace initiative at an “Ecumenical Consultation Conference” in Freising, Germany

April 2005: 90-minutes TV-Panel-discussion of this vision of peace organized by the Schweisfurth Foundation, with high level representatives of the three Abrahamic religions in Germany – broadcast in Arabic language all over the Middle East in August of 2005

June 2005: Invited to participate together with 75 awardees in the 25-year celebration of the Right Livelihood Award in Salzburg; meeting and cooperating for one week

August 2005: Second journey to Israel, meeting with members of the Chief Rabbinate, Christian Patriarchs, members of the Waqf, and with the Supreme Islamic Judge

October 2005: Jerusalem pre-conference at the Lassalle Institute, Switzerland

May 2006: The Temple Project Association is registered officially with the district court in Munich as a non-profit organization

June 2006: Third journey to Israel

June 2006: Lecture at a Middle East conference of the Royal Jordanian Institute for Interfaith Studies

June 2007: Psychology of Peace Conference, university of Konstanz, Germany

August 2007: Meeting with the Ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Berlin

August 2007: Fourth journey to Israel

December 2007: Full evening performance featuring me and this peace initiative at the “i-camp-theater” in Munich, Germany

January 2009: Middle East conference in Beirut

September 2009: Journey to Rome to meet Vatican officials

December 2009: Radio interview at Radio Horeb, Munich

February 2010: Fifth journey to Israel

June 2010: “The Crans Montana Forum”, Brussels; presentation of my initiative alongside with the Jerusalem Academy of Peace

April 2011: Lecture for the “Friends of Abraham”, Munich

June 2011: Presentation at “The Crans Montana Forum”, Brussels; personal meeting with Senator Jesse Jackson

September 2011: Conference of the Hanns Seidel Foundation, Munich: “Religious Implications of the Middle East Conflict”; my paper: “Two Traumatized Parties and One Possible Therapy”

March 2012: Lecture at another Conference of the Hanns Seidel Foundation, Munich: “Religious Connotations of the New Turkish Foreign Policy”

April 2012: TV-interview at the private Turkish A9-station

July 2012: Interview at Bavarian Radio 2, “TheoLogik”

April 2013: Lecture at the University of Munich, “Peace for the People in the Holy Land”

May 2013: Sixth journey to Israel and Jordan; meeting with the Jordanian Deputy Minister of Awqaf, Dr. Muhammad Ro’ud and the former Mufti of Bosnia Mustafa Efendi Cerić

November 2013: Lecture for “Weltethos” in Innsbruck: “Inter-Religious Peace Initiative and the Concept of Empathy. Empathy the Way to Reach Peace in the Holy Land”.

May 2014: Seventh journey to Israel and Palestine; meeting with Professor Sari Nusseibeh, President of the Al Quds University and with Palestinian Minister of Awqaf, Mahmoud Al-Habbash

June 2014: The „Weltethos“-Lecture is published in: Helmut Reinalter (Hg.), Weltethos-Gespräche, Interdisziplinäre Forschungen, Band 24, pp. 89-105

November 2014: Meetings in Vienna with Rabbi David Rosen and Msgr. Miguel Ayuso Guixot

January 2015: Lecture for OCCURSO, Munich: “Peace for the People in the Holy Land”

May 2015: Naumann-Foundation in Munich: “The dialogue with Islam: a choice between do-gooders and populists?” with Hamed Abdul-Samad, author of “The Islamic Fascism” and Gottfried Hutter, founder of the peace initiative “The Temple-Project”

June 2015: Presentation of this initiative at a roundtable of international religious leaders at the Crans Montana Forum in Brussels

