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SEA FOKUS

Gemeinsam tiefer blicken



Schweizerische
Evangelische
Allianz

World in Chaos

Committed to holistic
reconciliation and restoration

Pacifism

Wrestling for peace

Practice

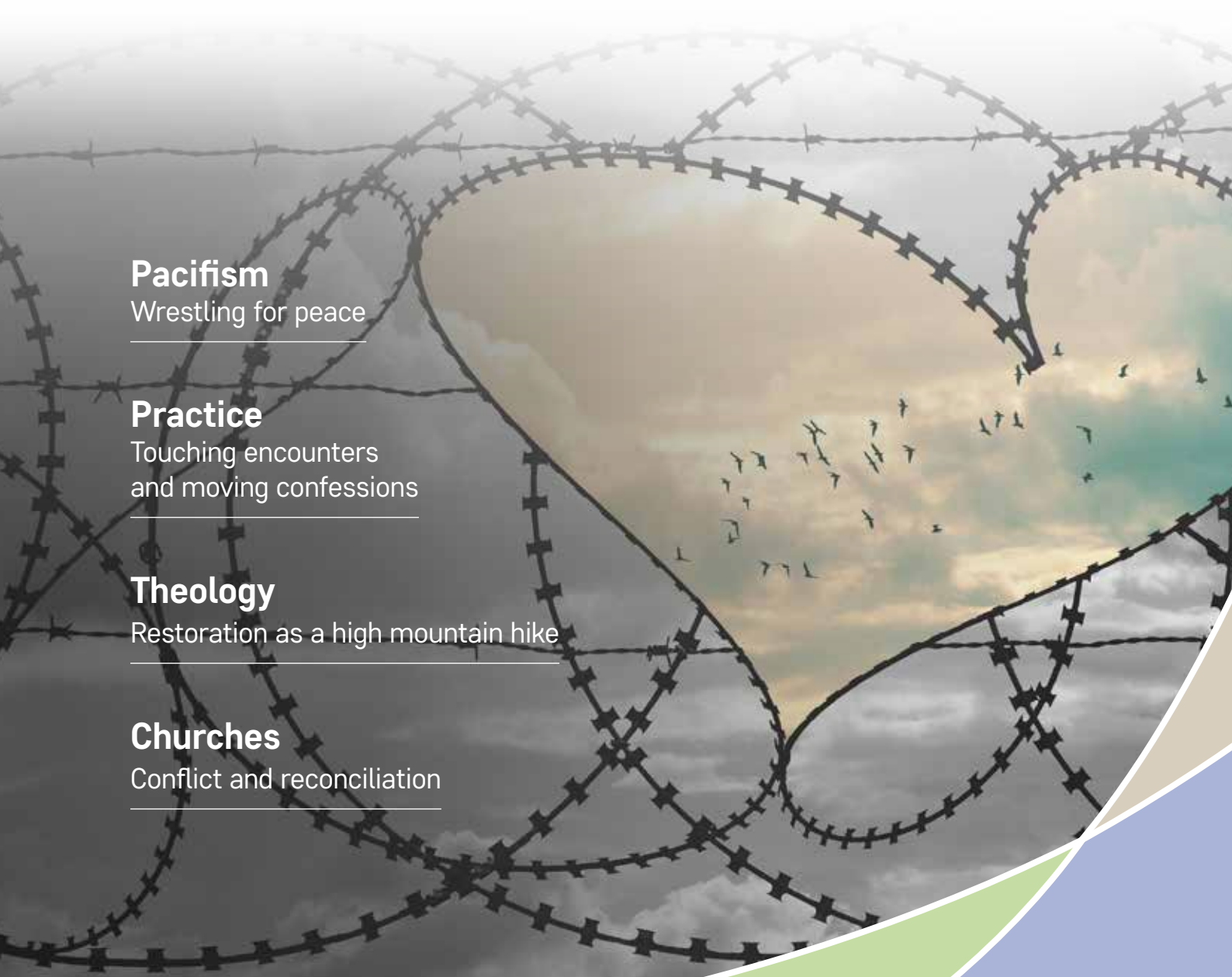
Touching encounters
and moving confessions

Theology

Restoration as a high mountain hike

Churches

Conflict and reconciliation



About the publication

«SEA Fokus» is the publication of the Swiss Evangelical Alliance SEA which takes a second look at major issues: It does not leave things at first glance level, but takes a closer look, analyses, questions, differentiates, comments. About twice a year, it focuses on a current topic that moves - indeed must move - evangelical Christians. The «SEA Fokus» (in German) can be subscribed to in printed form for a contribution towards costs or ordered individually and is freely accessible online. The publication is largely financed by donations; every contribution is welcome: www.each.ch.

Triggered by the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the Swiss Evangelical Alliance SEA published this issue

of «SEA Fokus» in 2022, in German. In the midst of a «world in chaos», it asks about the Christian commitment to holistic reconciliation and restoration. In view of the worldwide, unbroken topicality of the subject and the already international authorship, the «Peace & Reconciliation Network» of the World Evangelical Alliance as well as the European Evangelical Alliance showed interest in distributing a version translated into English. Together, the SEA, the EEA and the PRN are publishing this unique, special English edition. It is distributed as an online publication by the European Evangelical Alliance.



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Editorial

Dear Readers,

As a young boy, I listened to my grandparents' rare stories with a mixture of curiosity and horror. Their accounts of the war years sounded surreal to me – as if from another, far-off world. What always seemed far away in time and space is suddenly very close due to Russia's invasion of the Ukraine. The horror of seemingly bygone days has caught up with us.

In this «SEA Fokus» we take a defiant look ahead. Even though there is currently no visible easing of tensions in the war in the Ukraine, we hope, we pray and we work for peace. As Christians, we hold fast to the belief that new beginnings are possible and that enemies can become friends again. The same goes for countless other conflicts around the world.

But how can a flourishing life in community become possible again after Bucha, Sarajevo or Rwanda? And what is our role as Christians in this? In this edition, we give the floor to people from the Alliance's international network, who work more behind the scenes: Experts in mediation and conflict researchers explain how restoration can succeed. Because it is not only the houses that have to be rebuilt after a war, we learn from Christians from the past and present who have worked hard for new beginnings on an economic, social, political or legal level. And we ask for a theology that enables churches to be agents of reconciliation in the midst of strife.

This «SEA Fokus» is both exciting and hopeful. We are talking about what we wish for but do not yet see in many places. Perhaps it can give us an impulse to start restorative action in small ways in our everyday lives.



Andi Bachmann-Roth
Co-General Secretary SEA

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Excursus:
War in
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Individual
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Comment

Peace – Reconciliation – Restoration: Approaches to shimmering concepts

In the face of current war and conflict, churches and theology are challenged to reflect on their specifically Christian perspectives on peace, reconciliation and restoration. These differ from human-scientific concepts, for example, in the role they assign to human beings for the «production» of peace and reconciliation.

Since its origins, the Christian faith has been linked to the practice of social peace and reconciliation. The message of reconciliation and the belief in God's peace were never only inner convictions, they were also an external way of life. However, the exact scope of Christian peace and reconciliation practice, and the knowledge which can be derived from the gospel as guidance, are still disputed today. Theology and churches are therefore currently in dialogue with peace and reconciliation research, among others, in order to explore Christian concepts of peace and reconciliation in view of the multiple, interwoven wars and conflicts of the 21st century.

Disciplines from the Humanities, such as «conflict and peace research», «transitional justice research» or «reconciliation research» have their own angles with regards to the question of achieving sustainable peace and restoring relationships. In the field of peace research, for example, «peace» can be understood not only «narrowly» as the absence of personal violence, but also «broadly» as the absence of structural violence. Questions addressed include criteria for the responsible use of violence in

border situations, the role of international law and international organisations in ending violence and building peace, the role of democratic structures and the importance of civil conflict transformation.

Reconciliation research, on the other hand, focuses more on the relationship aspect and thus on emotional and cognitive factors for conflict prevention, transformation and resolution. The question of structural and supra-individual conditions is also an integral part of the concepts. Peace can only be sustainable if conflicts are dealt with at their roots; peace should therefore be qualified by reconciliation and, in best-case scenario, lead to the restoration of relations between all parties involved in the conflict; this according to the basic tenets of these approaches.

For the concept of restoration is not a nostalgic longing for the «status quo ante», the state before the conflict. Rather, both as term and concept, it can also contain moments of renewal and re-creation. Whether the concept of «(re-)creation» actually has the potential to become a guiding concept in peace and reconciliation research, for example because it is less strongly occupied and stereotyped than the «big» concepts of peace and reconciliation, should be discussed in more detail.

God is the Founder, man the forerunner of peace

Against the background of this human-scientific landscape, theology and churches face the challenge of reflecting on their specifically Christian perspectives on peace, reconciliation, and restoration. The primary source of strength and guidance for social

«Christian restorative action draws its power from an already restored, reconciled reality.»

Renewal and Recreation

It is interesting to note that the concept of «restoration» plays an important role in both fields of discourse: in the peace discourse, with regard to the restoration of a non-violent and, if possible, structurally peace-promoting state; in the reconciliation discourse with regards to the restoration of normal and, if possible, good relations of the individuals and groups involved in the conflict. In both discourses, the expression «(re) establishing» can also be found.

practice is the message of God's peace and reconciliation with and for his world. With a view to God's action of peace and reconciliation, believers testify to a reality that has already begun in Christ, encompasses the whole cosmos¹, overturns unjust conditions² and rectifies relationships³, and permanently transforms the world. Already here, fundamental differences to the non-theological

¹ cf. Col 1:19f.; 1 Jn 2:2.

² cf. Ps 85:11.

³ cf. 2 Cor 5:19.



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understanding of peace and reconciliation become apparent: peace and reconciliation are not «produced», but they were and

holistic understanding of peace and reconciliation is very much in line with «broad» concepts of peace and reconciliation in the

«The plurality of Christian peace ethics testifies to the living struggle of a community standing under the aegis of the Gospel.»

are instituted by God. Christian restorative action draws its power from an already restored, reconciled reality, which permanently embraces the broken world reality and creatively walks with it. This means that human beings are called to peace and reconciliation but are simultaneously always limited in this action. To use Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words, we can prepare the way for peace and reconciliation, but we cannot realize peace and reconciliation independently and fully. The all-too-human phenomenon of presenting oneself as the originator and ultimate guarantor of peace is thus rejected.

Valuing different decisions

At the same time, the biblical

humanities. It focuses not only on the absence of violence, but also (if possible) on the creation of sustainable social and international structures based on human dignity, as well as the facilitation of spaces for reconciliation. No less important, the church's guiding principle of «just peace» bears witness to this broad understanding of peace and reconciliation.

There is a consensus in theology and the Church on the priority option of non-violence and the outlawing of war. However, particularly with the events in the Ukraine, the question of the responsibility for the use of force as a last resort, for self-defence and for defence of alliances, have been brought to the fore and pro-

voked differences. The plurality of Christian peace ethics and with it the fundamental possibility of divergent decisions of conscience and deliberations in this matter should be valued and taken seriously. This testifies to the living struggle of a community under the aegis of the Gospel, where the reflection over the culpability of human action is sensitively carried out before and with God.



Dr. Maximilian Schell studied Protestant Theology and Psychology and is a research assistant at the Chair of Systematic Theology, Ethics and Fundamental Theology at the Ruhr University in Bochum. His research expertise includes peace and reconciliation studies; his dissertation «Wegbereitung der Versöhnung – Öffentliche Theologie im Kontext gesellschaftlicher Versöhnungsprozesse» («Preparing the Way for Reconciliation – Public Theology in the Context of Social Reconciliation Processes») was published in 2021.

Glossary of key terms

Restoration

What has happened cannot be undone, but a meaningful conflict resolution should aim at a reconciled togetherness. Getting there is a process, an actual transformation of everyday life (cf. Eph 4:17-32), whereby, figuratively speaking, the old self is removed again and again, like a garment.

Reconciliation

The original Greek text of the New Testament (e.g., 2 Cor 5:18-20) contains the word «katalasso». It is taken from the negotiating language of the Greeks and means to negotiate until an agreement is reached – e.g., for a common position. One agrees, so to speak, to slip into the skin of the adversary in order to understand each other and restore the relationship. In short: turning towards God and each other.

Forgiveness

Together with reconciliation, forgiveness is at the heart of the Gospel, perhaps the most important social and spiritual core competence of Christians: one no longer credits the other with one's guilt; the other is released from his or her position as debtor and set free. The associated letting go closes a negative past – but without trivialising what has happened. Through God's goodness, a transformation into healed memory can happen.

Conflict

The word conflict implies that in a situation at least two seemingly irreconcilable points of view or desires for action are opposed to each other. This applies to internal and interpersonal aspects as well as to entire groups or nations. Among other things, one speaks of open or frozen conflicts.

Mediation

A conflict is hardly ever resolved by the use of force or by a court decision in such a way that all parties are satisfied. Mediating and impartial counselling, communication techniques and recommendations for action serve to constructively deal with and defuse a conflict situation.

Peace

Since time immemorial, people have used greetings such as «Salam» or «Shalom» to communicate: Peace be with you. They express that they are travelling in a peaceful attitude or that they are receiving a guest in this spirit, without negative intentions. All this is not self-evident, which is why Jesus' words on peace are relevant every day.

Pacifism

A pacifist stance is fundamentally oriented towards peaceful and non-violent understanding between peoples. Since its emergence, the word pacifism has been seen primarily as a political term of struggle (e.g. anti-nuclear demonstrations and Easter marches during the Cold War). Due to the complex history of the term, neither the Anabaptists of the Reformation nor the Mennonites of the present are adequately addressed.

Just Peace

Just peace encompasses much more than the protection of people from the unjust use of force. It includes social justice, the rule of law, respect for human rights and security for all people (Ecumenical Call to Just Peace).

Just War

The doctrine of just war developed by Augustine (354 - 430) is about keeping the peace and preventing war or, where it cannot be prevented, limiting it. It is not primarily about justifying the use of military means.

Wrestling for peace

Dieter Baumann and Lukas Amstutz each represent a form of pacifism. In the conversation about war and peace and in their struggle in the search for peace, there is not the typical black and white of violence or non-violence, but many shades of grey in between.

How do you define your position?

Lukas Amstutz: I represent a «responsible pacifism» that is oriented towards the gospel of peace proclaimed and lived by Jesus Christ. On the one hand, I distinguish myself from a strict pacifism of the mind that, regardless of concrete situations, says absolutely: I do not interfere because I do not want to get my hands dirty with violence. On the other hand, from rational pacifism, which argues on a purely rational level that non-violence is more reasonable because it is more promising.

Dieter Baumann: I represent a kind of «right-wing pacifism». The term pacifism expresses my conviction that a just peace must be the goal of all intergovernmental and societal action and that renunciation of violence should be the primary option. However, since people are obviously capable of violence and use violence, it must be defined within society and between states which form of law-preserving violence is permitted and which is not. National and international law serves this purpose. However, sanctioning instruments are needed to ensure the state's monopoly on the use of force. Within the state, this is classically the police, and between states it is the armies.



How did you come to be in your position?

LA: It has to do with my biography and my church background. I grew up in a Mennonite church. The Mennonites belong to the three Historic Peace Churches. Their basic theological position, their Christianity and being a church have a lot to do with non-violence.

DB: My position was formed during my theological and military training. Renunciation of violence and love of enemies are important features of my «ethical compass». However, I also became aware that in order to secure peace and legitimately defend a society, it is necessary to have armies based on the rule of law and a functioning legal system.

How do you justify your position with your faith?

LA: As a follower of Jesus, I see myself challenged to love not only God and neighbour, but also the enemy. I believe that Jesus, with all that he said and lived, showed a way to respond differently to sinister spirals of conflict. My challenge is – and it is something I struggle with: how

can I live this non-violence? With every conflict I encounter in everyday life, this is put to the test.

DB: I have stayed on a classic Reformation line. The Reformers believed that Christians as citizens should also assume responsibility for the state and must face the dilemma of renouncing violence or using violence to protect their neighbour and the community. Luther recorded this tension, for example, in an answer to the knight Assa von Kram, who had asked him whether men of war could also be in a blessed state: «Let it be said to you that you must keep the will and the obligation, the desire and the necessity, the joy of war and the will to fight very far apart. (...) Wait until the need and the obligation come without the desire and the will.»

Is there such a thing as a «just war»?

DB: I understand the doctrine of just war as an attempt to deal with the tension between renouncing violence/loving one's enemies and using violence to protect one's neighbour and community. The early Christians could say that as Christians they were more willing to take vio-



Lukas Amstutz (1973) is co-President of the Mennonites in Switzerland and directs the Bienenberg Training and Conference Centre in Liestal. As a lecturer he teaches theology from a peace church perspective and is on the road as a speaker in various congregations. He is married and has two children who will soon be grown up.

lence upon themselves than to use it. But as they grew into state responsibility, they also had to use violence in their state func-

«The position of non-violence is not retreat, but an attempt to interrupt violence by non-violent means.»

Lukas Amstutz

tion. In doing so, they developed rules as to when it is legitimate for an «authority» or a country to wage war, and with what intention, in what manner and for what purpose it may be waged. In my opinion, however, there are no just wars, but only legitimate and lawful use of mili-

tary force within a system of international law.

LA: War is never just in my eyes. It is true that violence should always – and this is how I also understand Dieter Baumann – only be the last resort, i.e., the last means one still has at one's disposal. However, a look at history, and also the current war in the Ukraine show in a sad and shocking way how quickly this last resort is used. Very quickly, the established criteria for the use of force are no longer observed, violence escalates, and the machinery of war takes on a life of its own.

Are there non-violent options that are just?

LA: One should not start thinking about this only when a war breaks out but ask earlier how a war can be prevented. Examples of non-violent interventions – including in Ukraine right now – are people confronting a tank without weapons. That may be naïve, but in some cases it has achieved something. I don't have a solution ready for every conflict, but there is a

whole range of options, but you have to practise them. For example, the Swiss police have an impressive arsenal of non-violent intervention options that they use to de-escalate violent riots.

What is the role of the church in war?

LA: We as a church are supposed to work for peace and reconciliation. But to do that we have to behave as credible interlocutors, for all parties. The position of non-violence is not a retreat, but an attempt to interrupt violence with non-violent means and to create a space of encounter where negotiations are possible.

DB: For me, the separation of tasks between the military and the church is paramount. The principle of the World Council of Churches (WCC) is that war is not something according to God's will. It is not the task of the church or theology to legitimise warlike violence. However, the church should accept that – for self-defence, for example – state military force is needed and that its own members do military service.

Can peace be achieved with violence at all?

DB: Peace cannot be achieved with violence, but violence is needed to stop an attack that is against international law. Rather, diplomatic, economic, legal, civil society and other means are needed to achieve lasting peace.

What did the outbreak of Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine trigger in you?

DB: The war did not break out in February but began in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and other territories. But the recent events were an eye-opener for me that treaties and agreements are important, but in reality not every party adheres to them. That is why it is also necessary to be well equipped, trained and prepared militarily in one's own country.



Dieter Baumann (1973) has a doctorate in theology, is the author of the book «Militärethik» (Military Ethics) and has been a career officer since 2006. In 2013, he served as commander of Swisscoy Contingent 28 in Kosovo.

LA: The war triggers shock that such a thing is possible at all. And it makes people aware of the connections, including how the West looked the other way in favour of profitable business with Putin and trusted in a «rotten» peace. I am also shocked by the reaction of the Church, which is very quick to throw pacifism overboard. Before the war began, pacifist positions were in vogue, especially in church circles. In recent months, I have been accused several times that my position is naïve and undermines our security system.

What would be alternative courses of action to military force in this war?

LA: I am not in a position to tell Ukraine what to do. There is a range of options, from flight to sanctions to acts of sabotage that don't target people, or taking in deserters. But I don't have «the» solution. As a non-conflict party, we should not give advice, but use

«There are no just wars, only legitimate and lawful use of military force within an international legal order.»

Dieter Baumann

our privileged position to think about alternatives to the escalation of violence.

DB: I think Switzerland should continue to offer its good offices and provide humanitarian aid.

LA: We must not allow ourselves to be drawn into friend-foe thinking. In Russia, by no means all

people are in favour of the war or even actively oppose it. We have to keep in touch and maintain friendships. That doesn't mean to whitewash war, but building bridges to forces that don't agree with the war and are paying a high price for it.

What advice do you have for Christians who are struggling with the question of what their general position should be on the use of violence or the renunciation of violence?

LA: Reality shows that war is still an option. That is why, even from a pacifist position, it is necessary to consider what I do when I encounter violence. How do I relate to violence in view of Jesus who says: «Love your enemy»? I also think it is very important to deal with other opinions instead of staying in one's «bubble».

DB: I can only support this last point. When I studied theology, I was an exotic young officer. At the beginning, opinions and clichés clashed, but over time many things became clearer. I also find it important to research texts in the Bible and church history, where you can find both directions. However, these texts must always be read in their historical context. That way you can try to understand why who decided which way and sharpen your own position.

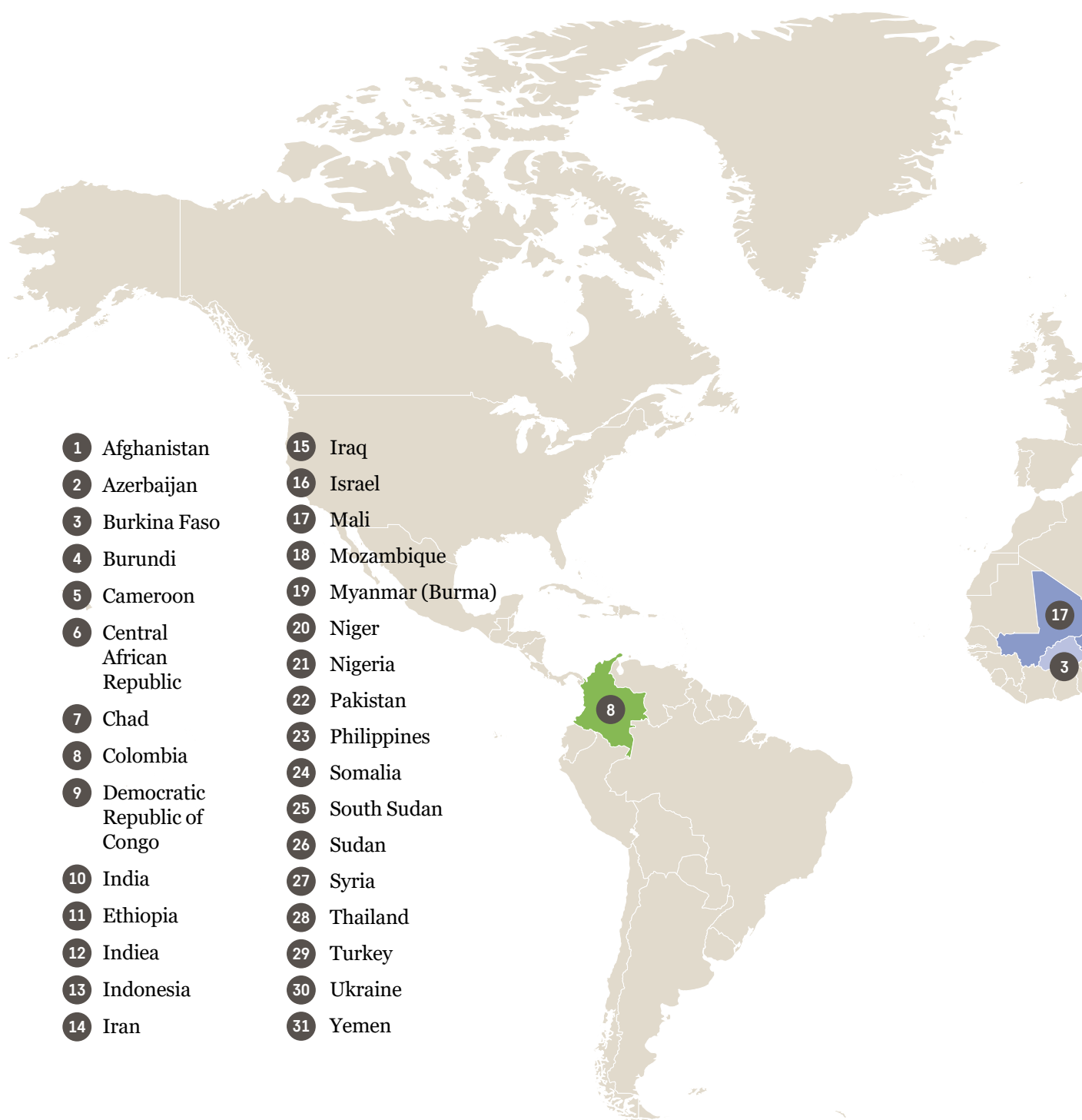


The interview was conducted by **Pascale Leuch.**

Conflicts of the world

Conflicts exist all over the world, but we only notice a few of them. The world map gives an insight into the location of violent hotspots. Only conflicts that are current after the year 2000 and have claimed at least 1000 lives to date are included. This means that only a part of all conflicts that are still ongoing are recorded.

The data is taken from the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP). This is a conflict annual dataset with information on armed conflicts in which at least one party is the government of a state.

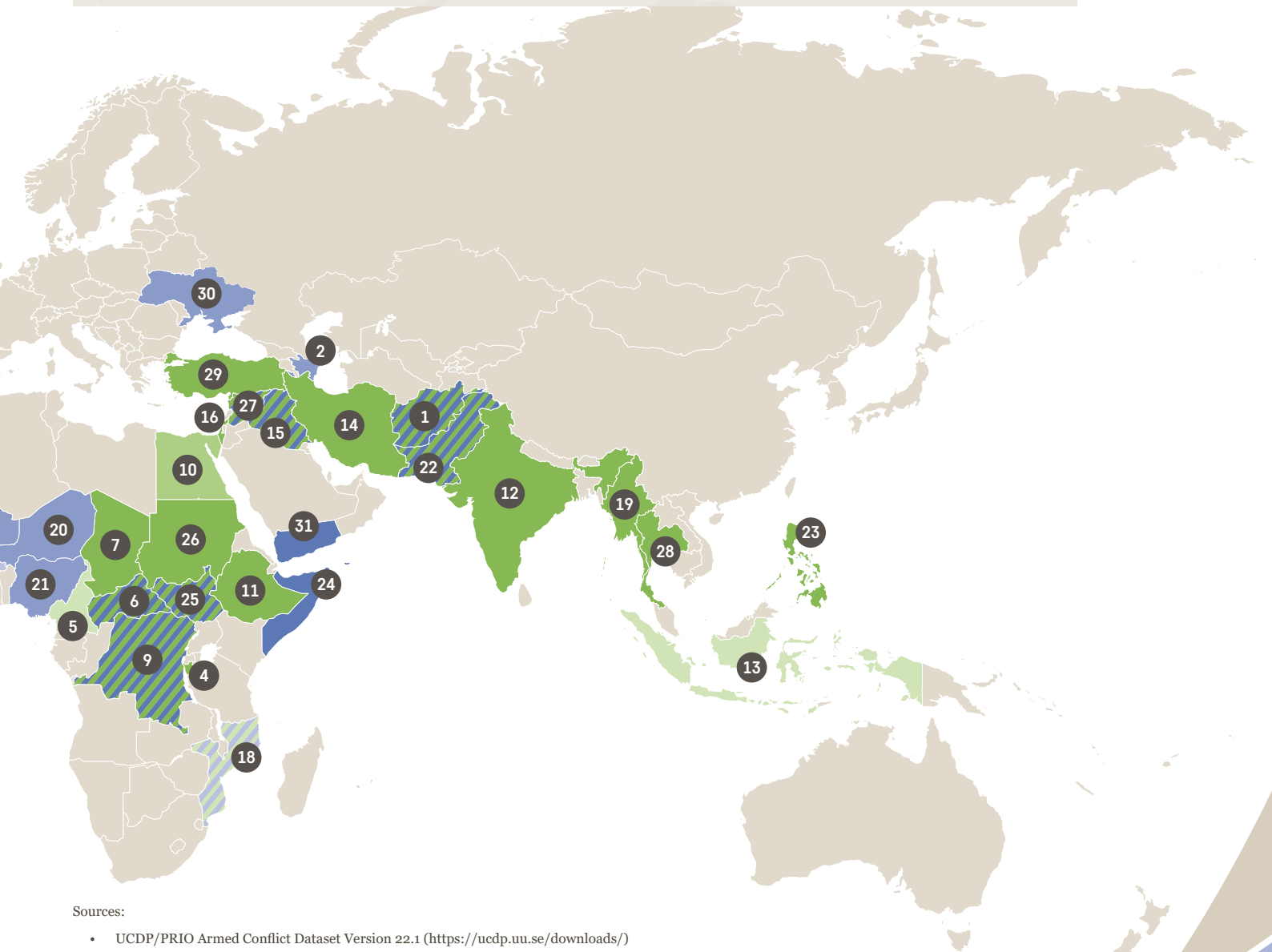


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|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 Afghanistan | 15 Iraq |
| 2 Azerbaijan | 16 Israel |
| 3 Burkina Faso | 17 Mali |
| 4 Burundi | 18 Mozambique |
| 5 Cameroon | 19 Myanmar (Burma) |
| 6 Central African Republic | 20 Niger |
| 7 Chad | 21 Nigeria |
| 8 Colombia | 22 Pakistan |
| 9 Democratic Republic of Congo | 23 Philippines |
| 10 India | 24 Somalia |
| 11 Ethiopia | 25 South Sudan |
| 12 India | 26 Sudan |
| 13 Indonesia | 27 Syria |
| 14 Iran | 28 Thailand |
| | 29 Turkey |
| | 30 Ukraine |
| | 31 Yemen |

Ongoing armed conflict between a state and internal opposition groups **with** involvement of other states:



Ongoing armed conflict between a state and internal opposition groups **without** involvement of other states:



Sources:

- UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset Version 22.1 (<https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/>)
- Davies, Shawn, Therese Pettersson & Magnus Öberg (2022). Organized violence 1989-2021 and drone warfare. *Journal of Peace Research* 59(4).
- Gleditsch, Nils Petter, Peter Wallensteen, Mikael Eriksson, Margareta Sollenberg, and Håvard Strand (2002) Armed Conflict 1946-2001: A New Dataset. *Journal of Peace Research* 39(5).



«Man is called man because...»

Conflicts mark our need to strive again and again for peaceful coexistence. Whether one needs to come to terms with oneself or whether there is a need for reconciliation between individuals or groups – the paths to clarification are manifold. And yet, there are commonalities.

During a holistic research on the topic of reconciliation, I also come across the music album «Mensch» by singer Herbert Grönemeyer. In the song of the same name, he deals with the death of his wife and brother – among other things – with the words «...man is called man

because he hopes and loves, because he sympathises and forgives». This musical confession virtually culminates in an ideal which, whenever it happens, is a gift: forgiveness. But it is not only a gift, it should be specifically striven for. Thus, in November 2006, the UN adopted a resolution that 2009 should be a «Year of Reconciliation». The corresponding text stated that «forgiveness, truth, justice and mercy» were necessary for living together.

It is no coincidence that these terms are found in the resolution initiated by Nicaragua at that time, because the Mennonite John Paul Lederach had modera-

ted peace talks during the civil war there with the help of Psalm 85. But the fact that these written confessions alone are not a guarantee for peace is something the world is experiencing today with renewed urgency. Seriousness and diversity are needed in the efforts for reconciliation. And ultimately, we believe, divine inspiration!

Step by step approach

When forgiveness is honestly and authentically granted or received, a great goal has been achieved, a new basis created. However, reconciliation does not automatically follow from this. It takes creativity to deal with the tension or conflict, to process it and even to overcome it. To really resolve it would be the ultimate goal. But this means that steps towards a reconciliatory relationship may come before forgiveness. One reason for this can be seen in the English or French translation of the German word «Versöhnung» (reconciliation): «Reconciliation» literally means to come together again or at all and to enter into dialogue – at eye level, to enable a deeper engagement with the conflict issue. An encounter that ideally restores a relationship.

Differentiating variants of conflict

As tragic as violent conflicts are, subliminal or frozen conflicts must not be forgotten. Be they inner conflicts, emotional, relational or conflicts in objectives,

**«If we talk about reconciliation,
the first thing is to make relationship
possible again.»**

«People want to feel they belong,
to feel safe, to be recognised in their
identity, to be able to be active in a
self-determined way and to experience
their lives as meaningful.»

throughout all of these, characteristics can be observed that impair or make it impossible to live together peacefully: being frozen and trapped in traumas, personal pain and questions of why; denying tensions and being oppressed by fears; being offended by certain statements; painting enemy images, prejudices and a black and white worldview; ignoring other people's standards of value; spreading rumours or pursuing hidden agendas; being bullied or betrayed; feeling deep mistrust; exaggerating the personal sense of justice and tending to subtle vendettas; refusing to talk.

Such elements can be more or less strong and thus decisive as to which conscious or unconscious resolution strategy is followed. For example: whether it comes to flight or fight, whether one gives in or involves a third party to mediate, whether one negotiates and is able to come to an agreement and is willing to reconsider subconscious evaluations in the process.

It is about Relationships

When we talk about reconciliation, it is first about making relationship possible again. It may not be possible to really resolve a tangible conflict, but nevertheless to shape it constructively – not least in the good hope of positive further development. Perhaps this requires changing certain living conditions and circumstan-

ces («structural change») or looking at and interpreting the corresponding conflict in a new way so that one could live with it («alternative attempt at interpretation»).

Due to the conflicts and wars since World War II, a lot of research and initiatives are trying to understand conflicts better and to contribute to a peaceful coexistence of people. There are no guarantees of success, no matter in which «kitchen» these concepts for peace have been prepared. Core values and keywords of such efforts are, for example, «non-violent communication», «mindfulness» or «dealing with the past» – the willingness to deal with both the roots and the wounds of a conflict.

Perceiving deep needs

Such universally valid aspects can be expanded and deepened quite specifically from a Christian perspective. In the context of the current Russia-Ukraine war, a Canadian conflict researcher¹ has compiled characteristics that could be understood as common to many, perhaps all, reconciliation efforts – be it on a personal, social or political level. These are ultimately non-negotiable and equally emotional aspects that are decisive for the identity of a person, entire groups, ethnic

¹ Vern Neufeld Redekop, of Ukrainian and Mennonite origin.

groups or nations: People want to feel that they belong, that they feel safe, that their identity is recognised, that they can be active in a self-determined way and that they experience their lives as meaningful. These are just a few words, but if they were applied consistently, the world would look different.

Among other things, Christians can also draw on a mandate from Paul to work for reconciliation.² The word «katalasso» used there is borrowed from Greek negotiation language and expresses slipping into the skin of the adversary in order to understand him better and thus overcome alienation.³ This is what it is all about: building bridges to enable encounters with respect and appreciation – both to clear up the past and to look to the future. Let us take this as an invitation from Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, for us to get on our way and be peacemakers!

² cf. 2 Cor 5, 18-20.

³ cf. Reimer, Johannes: Wo Versöhnung zu Hause ist - Gemeinde als Versöhnungszentrum. (Where Reconciliation is at Home – the Church as Reconciliation Centre.) Werdewelt Publishing and Media House, 2020.



Tom Sommer comes from a background in animal welfare research and film work. Today he promotes understanding for peace and reconciliation through www.versoeht.ch.

Restoration – The path is the goal?!

Christophe takes a sheet of paper and tears it up, quickly and thoroughly. Then he lifts up the two halves. He holds the frayed edges together so that they become one again. «This», he says, «is reconciliation for me».

Christophe Mbonyingabo is Rwandan. He survived the 1994 genocide, and he knows what he is talking about. He founded the Christian initiative CARSA («Christian Action for Reconciliation and Social Assistance»), which works for restoration and reconciliation between survivors and perpetrators of the genocide.¹

Christophe's short, impressive answer to my question «What is reconciliation for you?» points to two things. First: Reconciliation or restoration does not necessarily mean restoring the original state. In this respect, the term «restoration» should be used with caution here. Even a paper glued together will always bear the lasting scars of the violent act that tore it apart. Moreover, «restoration» is not always desirable either, for instance if it were a matter of restoring a state marked by oppression. And there is something else that Christophe's example shows. Restoration in the sense of reconciliation, a healing of broken relationships, is possible – despite all injuries.

But something very crucial cannot be depicted with the help of the paper: Restoration is a process. A process that takes a long time. Restoration is thus both the goal of this path and the path itself. And this path is not always straight, but runs in serpentine,

leads along steep and stony paths and sometimes even into a dead end. More like a demanding high-mountain hike than a Sunday afternoon stroll. In the following, some central milestones of this path will be outlined.

Down in the valley – Or: Why restoration?

Restoration is necessary where something has fallen apart. And conflict precedes rupture. So here we are at the bottom of the valley of human relations. There are numerous theories in research for the cause of conflict. Reformation theology sees unbelief as the root of all evil, theologically

the Christian commitment to peace, reconciliation and restoration, the vertical axis and the horizontal axis thus meet. Ambassadors of reconciliation are not only individual Christians, but also collectives such as church communities.

He started it! She is to blame! – Or: Watch out for the scapegoat

Conflicts are often played out as a «blame game». Who is to blame? A scapegoat is quickly sought and found. A Christian theology, however, does not play this game. It does not allow itself to be lured onto a false track by the scape-

«A Christian theology does not allow itself to be led astray by the scapegoat.»

speaking: sin. In unbelief, human beings reject the love relationship that God offers: a rupture with far-reaching consequences for all people, namely unkindness not only towards God, but also towards self, other people and the environment. The New Testament concept of sin is correspondingly comprehensive, «the concept of human behavior through which a desired goal, a path, a relationship is missed»².

Therefore, if sin is understood as a failed path and a broken relationship, restoration is the healing of relationships and about setting the path right. The act of reconciliation of God in Christ³ is matched by the reconciliatory action of people towards each other. In

goat. The search for the guilty starts with myself, with the confession of my own guilt, for restoration needs truth. But Christian theology does not leave the guilty person alone with his or her guilt, but shows ways beyond the scapegoat mechanism and destructive self-accusation. Confession, a seemingly forgotten relic from ancient times, comes into view here as an «offer of divine help»⁴. Its life-giving power for a new beginning needs to be discovered anew and creatively!

This is as far as it goes – Or: Forgiveness as a steep hill

Sooner or later, on the path of recovery, one encounters a steep cliff called «forgiveness». Can it

¹ cf. www.carsaministry.org.

² Härle W., Dogmatik. Berlin 2000, 461.

³ cf. 2 Cor 5:14-21.

⁴ Bonhoeffer D.: Gemeinsames Leben. Das Gebetbuch der Bibel. (Common Life. The Prayer Book of the Bible.) DBW 5, Munich 1987, 98.

be climbed at all? The promise and claim of forgiveness is pointedly formulated in the Lord's Prayer: «And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.»⁵ This is contrasted with the experience of infinite suffering, for example in the face of massive human rights violations. After Auschwitz, the philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch writes in inversion of Jesus' words on the cross: «Lord, do not forgive them, for they know what they do».⁶ Jankélévitch points out two things here: forgiveness cannot be demanded, certainly not from the perpetrators. And: forgiveness does not just happen by itself over time. Rather, in the words of Hannah Arendt, it is like a miracle, a breaking in of the last into the last but one. Forgiveness liberates. It liberates the victim, who once again experiences himself as having power over his own life. And it liberates the perpetrator, who is no longer reduced to his deeds. The great South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu knew about this liberating power of forgiveness when he cried out to his countrymen who had been brutally oppressed for decades: «No future without forgiveness!»⁷

Safeguards – Or: Restoration needs reparation

Looking at the ongoing journey of restoration in South Africa, Mxolisi Mpanbani writes: «Once upon a time there were two boys, Tom and Bernard. Tom lived across the street from Bernard. One day Tom stole Bernard's

⁵ Matthew 6:12.

⁶ Jankélévitch V.: Verzeihen? (Forgiveness?) in: Ders.: Das Verzeihen. Essays zur Moral und Kulturphilosophie (Essays on Morality and Cultural Philosophy), Frankfurt a. M. 2003, 243-283; 265.

⁷ Tutu D.: No Future Without Forgiveness. New York 1999.



In Rwanda, the population is particularly sensitive to reconciliation because of history.

«The reconciling action of God in Christ corresponds to the reconciling action of human beings among themselves.»

bicycle. From then on, Bernard saw Tom riding his bike to school every day. After a year, Tom approached Bernard. He held out his hand to him and said: «Come on, let's make up with each other and put the past behind us!» Bernard looked at Tom's hand. «And what about the bike?» «No», Tom said, «I'm not talking about the bike. I'm talking about reconciliation.»⁸ Restoration needs reparation. Without justice, reconciling restoration remains empty; without reconciling restoration, justice remains cold. Desmond Tutu's phrase «No

future without forgiveness» therefore needs a sister: «No forgiveness without future».⁹

⁹ Letter from Jürgen Moltmann to the author, 11 September 2019.



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⁸ Quoted in: Krog A.: Country of my skull. New York 1999, 164.

Christian «rules of war» for our world

Henry Dunant (1828-1910) was duly celebrated on the occasion of SEA's recent anniversary. And rightly so. Not only was he active as secretary of the first Swiss branch of the Evangelical Alliance, he also founded a kind of youth alliance here that later led to the founding of the World Federation of Young Men's Christian Associations (YMCA). Above all, however, Dunant was an important initiator of the Red Cross and international humanitarian law.

Henry Dunant was a pietistic businessman and visionary, who was also attentive to the social needs of his time. In 1859, he experienced the Battle of Solferino as a spectator. Dunant was confronted with tens of thousands of wounded who were being cared for by only a few women. In keeping with his temperament, Dunant «helped, fed, bandaged and comforted»¹.

After the bloody battle, he wrote his «Memories of Solferino» in 1862 and made suggestions on how war wounded could be better helped. In 1863, together with the Swiss Sonderbund General Henry Dufour, among others, he called together personalities from 17 European countries for a congress in Geneva. They issued an appeal to the governments of Europe of the time to «establish National Relief Societies, to lend protection and support to these societies, to designate field hospitals and dispensaries, medical personnel, volunteers and the wounded as invulnerable in time

1 Dunant, Jean Henry, in: Christen, Beat (ed.): La Suisse existe (Switzerland exists), 2001, self-published, p. 97.

of war, and to mark all protected persons and institutions with a common, easily recognisable sign»². A year later, twelve states put their seal under the document. It later became, with three other conventions and two additional protocols, the cornerstone of today's international humanitarian law, the so-called Geneva Conventions. The five men who had convened the first congress constituted themselves as the «International Committee of the Red Cross» (ICRC) even before the first agreement was concluded.

«The implementation of Henry Dunant's vision remains an urgent concern, especially for Christians.»

Protection for more and more groups of people

The common thread running through the individual articles of the convention at that time is the neutrality of the sick and wounded in war, as long as the field hospitals are not staffed by military personnel. Protected are the «persons in charge of supervision, health care, administration, transport of the wounded, as well as the field preachers»³.

2 Dunant, Henry: Eine Erinnerung an Solferino. Jubiläumsausgabe 125 Jahre Rotes Kreuz (A Memory of Solferino. Anniversary edition 125 years of the Red Cross), Bern 1988, SRC, p. 81.

3 Dunant, Henry: Eine Erinnerung an Solferino. (A Memory of Solferino), Zurich 1967, Atlantis, p. 124f.

In the face of an increasingly total war, this area of responsibility was extended to care for all victims of the war. It now applied to «prisoners of war, the wounded and sick, admitted and deported civilians, evacuees and the homeless, the population of occupied territories, refugees and displaced persons»⁴. Parallel to this, work developed in peacetime with the Red Cross societies and their help for «the sick, the injured, the infirm, for old people and children, for the victims of disasters at home and abroad».

The vision of Henry Dunant and his comrades-in-arms has taken shape and changed our world at least a little. But its implementation remains an urgent concern, especially for Christians. According to Dunant, the Gospel has not only a spiritual but also a social message: «Only when people act in love, care for their neighbour and take care of the weaker one, the Gospel is lived.»⁵

4 Haug, Hans in: dito, p. 132.

5 Hanimann, Thomas: Was glaubte Henry Dunant? SEA-Stellungnahme (What did Henry Dunant believe? SEA Statement), 2010, p. 10.



Hanspeter Schmutz is a publicist and Managing Director of «Insist Consulting».

Isaac and Abimelech as role models for today's Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Evan Thomas has dedicated more than 40 years of his life in the pursuit of reconciliation between local followers of Jesus, deeply impacted by the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. He will present one model of reconciliation found in the Hebrew Scriptures. It reflects the narrative of a well-known Biblical Father, Isaac. We will see how the principles of God's Kingdom concerning reconciliation are apparent in this narrative.

Conflict is endemic to the human condition and unavoidable, wherever we gather and create society. Resolving conflict is always challenging, even between two people. Resolving intractable conflict between people groups who have divergent historical narratives and world views, and who inevitably attract allies to support their respective positions, is very challenging.

New Testament Scripture exhorts us to become agents of change and a testimony of hope to our suffering communities. We find examples of these exhortations in Matt 5:9 «Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God» and Rom 12:18 «If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone».

In his second letter to the Corinthians 5:18,19 Paul reminds us that the ministry of reconciliation is a core value of the Gospel message. As such, we are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation, guiding mankind into right relationship with God, and with one another.

Territory and water – reasons for conflict for ages

In Genesis 26, we discover an excellent example of intercommunity

disputes over territory and water, two elements among many that still keep Israelis and Palestinians gripped in conflict until today. Despite the land being struck by famine, Isaac and his rapidly expanding family flourish in the Land under God's blessing. However, fellow-occupiers of the region, the Philistines, are envious of Isaac's successes and seek to drive him away by filling up the wells and cutting off the water supply. The Philistine king, Abimelech, anticipates political strife and exhorts Isaac to move on, which he does, though it seems, not far enough. The peace between them is short-lived when more wells are dug, and the herders of both communities quarrel over water rights. Again Isaac moves on and resettles in Beersheba (literal meaning: the seventh well). There, God reassures him of his favor and his promises, prompting Isaac to build an altar as an expression of his devotion.

«The ministry of reconciliation is a fundamental value of the Gospel message.»

Abimelech, a wise community leader, once again approaches Isaac to seek «a peace agreement.» In true Middle-eastern style, Isaac prepares a feast for them and an agreement is reached. These two leaders demonstrate a powerful model for God-fearers in the Holy Land today. When our communities, under wise leadership, approach one another seeking «win-win» solutions to our con-



flicts, we can not only live in peace and cooperation with one another, but also provide a testimony and model for our respective societies that are so entrenched in sectarianism.



Evan Thomas is a Messianic Jewish follower of Jesus and immigrated to Israel in 1983 where he began to serve the local Messianic congregation of Netanya. His other responsibilities in ministry have included 25 years-service as chairman of the National Evangelism Committee of Israel and as Chairman of the Board of Directors for the Reconciliation Ministry Musalaha for 30 years.

Pilgrimage of grace



The pilgrimage group consisted of leaders from various ministries and denominations in South Africa as well as some guests from abroad.

The story of reconciliation in South Africa has many faces. The «Pilgrimage of Grace» is one of them.

From 23 to 25 September 2022, 60 leaders from different ministries and denominations in South Africa and some selected guests from abroad undertook a pilgrimage of reconciliation through the Cape Province. Under the leadership of the South African Christian Leaders' Organisation (SACLI), we began our journey at Moravian Hill Church in Cape Town's 6th District – the first congregation founded by the German Herrnhuter missionaries among the indigenous Koi. Here they had experienced unimaginable injustice during apartheid. In the service here, and later in the oldest Dutch Reformed Church (NRC) in South Africa, the Groote Kerk in the centre of Cape Town, the bishops of the two formerly unreconciled churches prepared us for the joint journey to the southernmost point of the continent.

The first stop was Genadendal – the place where the first Herrnhut missionary, Georg Schmidt,

began his missionary work among the Koi people, in 1727. It was in this place the first natives of the country came to faith and a church was founded. The young mission church met fierce resistance from the NRC. From Stellenbosch, 80 kilometres away behind the mountains, people complained that the small church bell in Genadendal rang so loudly that it disturbed the Reformed service there. Georg Schmidt soon had to leave the country, but he was followed 20 years later by new missionaries from Herrnhut.

«We cried together and fell into each other's arms after forgiveness had been pronounced.»

Moving confessions

After 300 years, the church leaders decided to reconcile. The reconciliation service took place in Genadendal, on 24 September 2022. The leading bishop of the NRC, Nellis Jansen van Rensburg, asked the Moravians for forgiveness for all the atrocities his church had done to the Herrnhutters. He listed many resolutions of his church against the Koi church and asked for forgiveness again and again, deeply moved. And then he asked God's forgiveness that his Reformed Church had prevented missionary work among the South African tribes and laid the foundation for the inhuman system of apartheid. «We have sinned against God and man,» the bishop tearfully confessed. And the Moravian

Church accepted his apology. «Now our churches want to work together, hand in hand, for reconciliation in our country,» he said.

Moved by the NRC's confession, the president of the Moravian Church also confessed how wrongly the Koi Church had treated its leading women. He asked God and the women in his church for forgiveness. Thus one confession triggered another.

Heaven on Earth

Reconciled with each other, our pilgrimage moved to the southernmost tip of Africa, Cape Agulhas. Here too, we Europeans present from Germany, Holland and Great Britain asked the peoples of Africa and God for forgiveness for all the atrocities of colonial history. And the Africans forgave us and asked God for blessings for our common future. We wept together and fell into each other's arms after forgiveness was spoken. Somehow, heaven seemed to come down to us.



Dr. Johannes Reimer is Professor of Missiology and Intercultural Theology in Germany and South Africa. He also directs the Peace and Reconciliation Network of the World Evangelical Alliance.

Opening encounter in the desert

30 women from all over Israel and the Palestinian territories with different attitudes, religions and conflicts spend four days together in the Jordanian desert. The Christian organisation «Musalaha», Arabic for reconciliation, creates opportunities for people to discover common ground and togetherness where previously they saw each other as enemies.

We were happy to set out again on a journey of reconciliation with 30 courageous Israeli and Palestinian participants. Meeting these interesting and diverse women from all over Israel and the Palestinian territories was a great blessing. The participants were a colourful mix of conservative, traditional, and modern women from the three Abrahamic religions. Professionally, some work in the fields of psychology, business administration, ecology and education, and numerous others are training the young leaders of tomorrow.

After two years marked by the pandemic, we were finally able to return to Wadi Rum in Jordan for four days. There, in this place of tranquillity but also of probation, the participants were able to increasingly free themselves from the strict values and world-views that have a grip on their respective environments.

Listening, discussing, reflecting

For this first retreat, we had decided to focus on two chapters of Musalaha's «Roadmap of Reconciliation»: «Active Listening» and «The Conflict». We organised many walks, cultural evenings, camel rides and jeep tours to



The Jordanian desert has been the site of a moving story of reconciliation.

explore these two concepts, followed by discussions and group reflections. On long walks we listened to the voice of the wind and the sound of footsteps in the sand. It became clear to us that we are at the same time followers and leaders of our travelling companions.

«It was powerful to see how these women cared for each other amidst the hardships of the desert.»

The change of pace and atmosphere helped us to listen to each other's hearts and to be fully present in each conversation. After learning about mindful listening, we explored the volatile topic of conflict. All participants rose to the challenge with an open mind, finding common ground and a sense of belonging in the most unlikely of circumstances. And

after realising their common humanity – among people previously considered enemies – they were able to open up and share their stories and their experience of being shaped by the conflict.

This is only the first step and yet we have already come a long way. The tenor of the meeting was one of calm, responsibility, and trust. It was powerful to see how these women cared for each other amidst the hardships of the desert. Despite all difficulties, we should always remember to stand by each other.



Dr. Salim Munayer is Executive Director of Musalaha, an organisation that facilitates reconciliation mainly between Israelis and Palestinians, based on biblical principles. In addition, he is Regional Coordinator for the Peace and Reconciliation Network, an initiative of the World Evangelical Alliance.



«The story goes on»

Mirjam Neis is a qualified nurse and is member of the board of the Swiss Restorative Justice Forum, where she promotes restorative justice.

Mirjam Neis learned about the work of Prison Fellowship Switzerland (PFS) through a stroke of fate. What still connects her to it today and why she is committed to so-called restorative justice.

Mirjam Neis, you came across the work of Prison Fellowship through a stroke of fate?

Yes, my brother killed our grandparents in spring 2006. Of course, that was intense. He was 21 and I was 19. I decided pretty soon afterwards to talk openly about it.

What made you do it?

Because for me the murder had to do with silence. That's why it's important to me to show that it's better to speak about an inner distress before something happens. Sure, words have power, but one must not forget that they are only words. Not deeds. Tal-

king about it was and is also good for me as a processing process. I also want to support people who have experienced similar things, because you are so alone with it. Sometimes you are also left alone by your own environment and there is hardly any help.

What helps you deal with the criminal offence?

Various things. Among other things, the thought that it goes on. No matter what has happened, it is not the end point. The story goes on. It's up to me to keep writing the story. If you open the Bible, you will find weird stories there too. As a person of faith, I also have hope from God. The hope that forgiveness will happen. I say casually: If anyone can make gold out of shit, it's God.

Did anyone refer you to Prison Fellowship?

No. But about four years after the offence I realized I wanted to get involved. Do something positive with it. I didn't know exactly how and where yet, so I googled, found PFS and registered there. I met people who had experienced similar things. I accompanied relatives of offenders, I could listen or even share. We understood each other. In the meantime, I am only a member of the PFS and now work on the board of the Swiss Restorative Justice Forum (SRJF).

What is the SRJF?

This association works for the dissemination of Restorative Justice. This is also a concern of PFS. Claudia Christen, on the board of PFS and also president of the SRJF, asked me a few years ago if I wanted to take part in a

pilot project of the SRJF. In this project, offenders and relatives of similar offences committed by the present offenders meet in a so-called indirect setting. I participated and was so enthusiastic that I wanted others to benefit from such courses. That's how I came to be on the board. I represent the interests of the persons concerned and can also say from my own experience how something feels to me.

«It is better to talk about an inner distress before something happens.»

Could you give an example?

In a flyer for a group course with an indirect perpetrator-victim setting, the issue was the wording. First, it said «to restore relationships». I pointed out that this was a lofty goal and that there are people who do not want this at all or not yet. So we switched to the more neutral term «dialogue». It is important that these courses take place without pressure. Everyone is allowed and no one obliged, the goal is not predetermined. Everyone participates voluntarily.

What was the relationship with your brother like?

Shortly after the criminal offence, I went to visit him. Later I didn't manage to go. I asked myself two questions: Does he deserve it? Does it bring me anything? I came to a no twice – until I had a special experience. It was like God saying

Prison Fellowship Schweiz (www.pfch.ch) is a branch of the worldwide movement Prison Fellowship International (PFI). It cares for prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families and victims of crime and advocates for Restorative Justice. Prison Fellowship Switzerland works interdenominationally and is a member of the Swiss Evangelical Alliance SEA.

The **Swiss Restorative Justice Forum** (www.swissrjforum.ch) is an association dedicated to the

dissemination of information, development, and implementation of restorative justice. It also promotes the training of RJ practitioners.

Restorative Justice is based on the premise that the conventional justice system does not usually adequately meet the needs of victims, offenders and society. It promotes the active participation of all parties in creating a healing form of justice.

to me: «Why do you think you are better? There is grace for your brother too.» Afterwards, I looked at my hands and knew that I was also capable of it.

What was your answer?

So God, I'll go and see him again, but you have to give me the love for my brother. I got this new love and at the same time it was the starting point for forgiveness. I wanted to forgive. Despite all the anger and excessive demands that were also there.

Were you able to forgive your brother?

Three years ago, he called me in August to invite me to his baptism in September. My first thought was that this was impossible – although I was happy for him. How could he be baptised without ever having asked me for forgiveness? In the end, I gave him a Bible verse that had accompanied me and my parents especially after the offence, and expressed my forgiveness to him in the presence of our parents. Doing this, and doing it in front of witnesses, was a great relief for me. I knew I could release him into God's arms. It felt like I had closed a chapter. After 13 years.

Sure, there are always incidents that scratch at my forgiveness. It is a lifelong process.

Is this one of the reasons why you are involved with Restorative Justice?

Yes, this commitment also helps me in my personal process. And, I am convinced of Restorative Justice because I witness people changing positively through following the courses – both offenders and victims. Studies also show this, by the way. The fact that Restorative Justice invites all parties affected by the harm done to a dialogue to decide together how to deal with the consequences of the crime and the effects on the future is a healing path for me.



The interview was conducted by **Martina Seger-Bertschi**. She is a freelance journalist and fascinated by restorative justice because she recognises parts of non-violent communication in it.



After the Second World War, industry flourished in Tyrol, for example in the iron, metal and glass industries.

Economic recovery in times of hopelessness

Wars, flight and displacement are accompanied by a lack of food, medical care, drinking water and energy. In order to restore a country or region, the economic aspect in particular must be considered. What this can achieve can be impressively shown by the example of Tyrol.

There are many encouraging examples from the history of the last century, in which the two world wars in Europe in particular left many areas seemingly hopelessly destroyed. The concept of the social market economy, developed before the Second World War at the University of Freiburg in Breisgau by Walter Eucken, Franz Böhm and Leonhard Miksch, among others, came to fruition after the end of the war as a Christian-motivated economic alternative model between communism and capitalism. An economic boom unimaginable at the end of the 1940s brought prosperity to many and permanently changed the economic and social structures of several countries such as Germany and Austria.

Taking Tyrol as an example, the economic situation can initially be

described as almost hopeless: Massive supply problems, malnutrition and housing shortages, exacerbated by the presence of more than 100'000 refugees, as well as confiscations by the occupying powers determined every day life. The almost complete collapse of all transport and communication routes made reconstruction difficult, for which there was a shortage of labour everywhere. Tyrolean agriculture was characterised by very small farms, poor infrastructure, an extremely low degree of mechanisation and the grinding poverty of a large part of the farming population.

Central importance of small and medium-sized enterprises

However, both Marshall Plan aid measures and the establishment of numerous family-run SMEs caused the number of people employed in industry to increase rapidly after 1946. New industrial zones were created and businesses in various sectors expanded. Several later leading Tyrolean companies were founded in the first post-war years, such as Röhren- und Metallwerke in Hall (1947), Riedel-Glas in Kufstein (1956) or Biochemie Kundl (1948, today Sandoz).

The dominance of medium-sized and smaller industrial enterprises also meant that conflicts between labour and capital remained the exception and the socialist labour movement could hardly gain a foothold. The importance of SMEs for the economic recovery of a country can hardly be overestimated, according to Dr. Peter Heslam of Cambridge University. Heslam says: «SMEs are the world's leading creators of new jobs, wealth and opportunity, making significant contributions to GDP in many developing and growing economies.»¹

Economic restoration begins with individuals who, regardless of the most adverse circumstances, carry a hope that the likeness of God and His creative power remain valid. They can work in the application of innovation, judgement and risk-taking for the benefit of the people of a region.

¹ Heslam, Peter: Transforming Capitalism: Entrepreneurship and the Renewal of Thrift. Grove Books, 2010.



Timo Plutschinski is an evangelical theologian, business ethicist and author of several books. He leads the Business Coalition of the World Evangelical Alliance and serves as co-pastor of the Joshua church in Schenefeld/Hamburg.

When «reconciliation» requires adaptation

It's a Sunday morning worship service in a congregation that could be in the USA or South Africa. Looking around, one sees people from very different ethnic backgrounds – a diversity that is impressive in view of the long history of racial segregation. We are left with the impression of a reconciled community, a sign of a unity in Christ that transcends borders. But can reconciliation be measured solely by the fact that people of different cultural backgrounds live peacefully and amicably in relationship with each other?

Settler colonies, such as the USA or South Africa, face particular challenges in terms of reconciliation between the communities of settlers and the (formerly) colonised – not only in terms of high social inequality. It is true that many churches today focus on overcoming racial segregation by creating multi-ethnic, «reconciled» communities. This sometimes includes a critical reappraisal of the theology that helped to create racial segregation, such as during apartheid in South Africa. But it is often not accompanied by a genuine surrender of privilege for the sake of communion with the other.

Marked by colonial ways of thinking

The US sociologist Korie Edwards identifies white supremacist attitudes precisely in the way white people often try to overcome racial thinking. The example of South Africa shows: Congregations that become ethnically diverse are usually those led by whites or oriented towards a Western theology. Cultural diversity arises there because «people

of colour» join congregations where white people are at home. To find white people in indigenous African churches is an absolute exception. And in ethnically mixed congregations, it is expected

that people adapt to the culture of the marginalised and oppressed Jews. For settler colonies today, this would mean to also seeking reconciled, multicultural communities by having «white» Christi-



ted that people adapt to a language, manners and a theology that is Western instead of indigenous. White people thus determine the conditions under which a «reconciled», multicultural community is possible.

If reconciliation in settler colonies now falls into the trap of perpetuating old hierarchies in a new, multi-ethnic, guise, what would be viable alternatives? First, «settler» Christians would have to become aware of their colonially shaped, continuing dominance. And secondly, they could take their cue from Jesus as well as from the structures of the New Testament churches: Jesus gave up his divine privileges to proclaim God to people on their own terms. Similarly, Gentile Christians had to practice humility in order to become part of the com-

munity and engage with faith communities and practices of indigenous brothers and sisters. Communion around God's Word on «the other's» terms promises a deeper kind of reconciliation.



Marcus Grohmann wrote his doctoral thesis on reconciliation approaches of «white» people in multicultural congregations in South Africa. As a cultural anthropologist, he regards language as key to deep intercultural understanding.

War in the Ukraine: Understanding the times

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has resulted in the largest fighting and humanitarian crisis in Europe since the Second World War. While there is no end in sight, Christians have to ask what it looks like to live out the invisible reality of God's kingdom in midst of war.

Actually this war started eight years earlier. Several weeks after Maidan, the pro-democratic revolution in Ukraine, ousted Russia-leaning president Viktor Yanukovich, Russia used force to annex Crimea and start a war in the eastern portion of Ukraine. For years, the Russian government denied the direct participation of its armed forces in these developments. As this dubious denial illustrates, from the beginning Russia has been carrying out a war of information and attempting to create a parallel reality. To fully understand the current situation, we must view it against the backdrop of what has been happening in Ukraine since 2014, if not before that.

An existential threat

Complete control over Ukraine is essential to Vladimir Putin's life-long dream of re-establishing the «Russian world». A truly independent, democratic, and prosperous Ukraine moving away from its neighbor's orbit was a no-go for the modern-day Russian czar. For Putin, this was a greater existential threat than a potential NATO expansion or Ukrainian integration into the EU.

As the Ukrainian people kept refusing Russian control, Putin has been raising the price tag for

freedom. In 2004, peaceful protests, known as the Orange Revolution, were enough to keep him and his clique away for a time. But in 2022, Putin went all in, starting a full-blown war in the middle of Europe and using all kinds of modern weapons except nuclear ones ... for now. In the meantime, he claimed the firm backing of the majority of Russia's population and the sympathy of many people around the world.

This mirage is possible only through Putin's masterful use of myths, propaganda, and manipulation. Though many governments may be guilty of some degree of deception, the Russian leader has taken it to a new level, denying that the truth even exists. In a «reality» constructed by Putin, Ukraine is full of Nazis persecuting those who speak Russian. The rotting West is trying to destroy Russia, which remains an heroic stronghold of true faith, morale, and family values. There is no war at all, just a special military operation, which Russia is actually winning. And so on.

The world noticed little for a long time

This virtual reality, perpetrated for years, has caused much actual loss and suffering since May 2014. Thousands of people lost their lives and millions were displaced. The world noticed little of this, except when a passenger airplane flying over Ukraine was accidentally shot down by Russian troops. For years, this hybrid war became a bleeding wound that Ukraine was forced to learn to live with. Then on February 24, 2022, people all over the country woke up to the sound of bombings.

The explosions and the many atrocities that followed have sent shockwaves across Ukraine and around the world. Yet they have also activated something very different: a desire to help others. Christians and churches in Ukraine, along with many others, jumped into action. Their brothers and sisters around the world came alongside in prayer and provided support. Within days, Christians in neighboring countries mobilized in unprecedented ways to assist millions of refugees fleeing across the borders.

Only two scenarios to end the war

The full-blown war has been going on for many months now, with no end in sight. After a series of humiliating defeats on the battlefield, Putin has raised the stakes again by annexing the occupied territories, calling for a huge troop mobilization, and openly threatening to use nuclear weapons. As the threat becomes increasingly dire, many are asking what it would take to end the war. The situation is very complex, but essentially there are only two viable long-term scenarios, barring a miracle: In the first scenario, Russia withdraws voluntarily or is forced to do so. Most likely, this would mean the collapse of Putin's regime, and what happens then is anybody's guess. Under the other scenario, Ukraine stops defending and liberating itself, which would mean its end as a sovereign state and the loss of freedom of speech, religion and much more. To understand the implications of surrender for Ukraine, one needs to look no further than previously occupied Bucha or Melitopol. Any alternative «solution» or «deal» would only delay the



eventual occurrence of one of these two scenarios.

A test for every disciple of Christ

Following Christ is never easy, but it can be particularly challenging in the midst of war. What does it look like to live out the

«Following Christ is never easy, but it can be particularly challenging in the midst of war.»

invisible reality of God's kingdom that is here and among us? For many if not most believers in Ukraine, it means doing all they can to serve those affected by the war. For some, it means taking up arms and defending their people. Others feel called to remain in Russian-occupied territory to serve those who still live there. And of course, we all have opportunities to convey the truth. Each of these approaches presents

opportunities to communicate Christ's gospel and advance the kingdom.

What about those in other countries? What about believers in Russia? If anything, this is a test for every disciple of Christ, of our willingness and ability to discern God's guidance and apply it to our particular situation. In many ways, how we respond will define us for generations to come. This is the reason why most people remember Dietrich Bonhoeffer. There is no good answer, should we fail to respond, when future generations ask: «Where was the church when ... ?»

Only God knows when and how this war will actually end and what else it might catalyze. Nevertheless, Christians are responsible for understanding the times and acting accordingly. I lived long enough under the Soviet Union to be grateful for those who prayed for its collapse and who prepared themselves to serve people there once it happened. I appreciate the freedom we've enjoyed in Ukraine for many years now, despite the challenges we've endured and the

price we've paid. That's why we should pray for Ukraine to withstand this ultimate threat and emerge as a stronger and corruption-free nation. Let us help the Ukrainian people in every possible way in their journey through the valley of death. And let us pray for the Russian people, many of whom are victims of a war they also did not want. I hope that Russia will gain freedom too. But it doesn't come cheaply.



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Thorough reappraisal instead of superficial extinguishing work

Johannes Czwalina already published a book on the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2014.¹ In it, he believes peace is only possible if all parties involved are willing to put themselves in the mindset of the others and come to terms with the past. But that is not the case at the moment. A commentary on current events in four questions and answers:

1. How can this war be ended?

The deeper causes of the war must be considered. They are bitter roots, some of which go back a long time and have never been dealt with. They remain hidden in times of peace, but suddenly erupt again in times of tension and then cause unpredictable things.

Diplomacy is increasingly overburdened. Out of this ever-increasing deficit of unprocessed past, it has to serve the ever more rapidly developing fires with superficial extinguishing work. This shows that the thorough reappraisal of traumatic events of the past is the success factor for dealing with conflicts in the present. Most time is lost in peace efforts because one does not go back to the roots of the conflicts. The longest path can turn out to be the shortest path to resolving the conflicts.

For Putin, the fall of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who was ultimately controlled by Russia, was a huge humiliation. He never got over the loss of influence due to a new democratic system in Kiev that had freed itself from Russian tutelage. If you put yourself in his mind, it only had to be a matter of time before Russia took back its supposed possessions.

The war can only be ended if all sides are willing to put themselves in the mindset of the other side. Negotiations as such are useless unless there is a genuine willingness to negotiate on both sides.

¹ Czwalina, Johannes: Die Wirklichkeit einblenden! Wege zum Frieden (Fade in reality! Ways to peace), Dittrich Verlag, 2017. First edition: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit als Schlüssel für langfristigen Frieden (Coming to terms with the past as the key to long-term peace), 2014.

2. Would the problem be solved if Putin were no longer in power – keyword «tyrannicide»?

That may be, but it also may not be. Dimitri Medvedev would possibly take over and nothing would change. As a Christian, I would rather pray that God speaks through circumstances. God can turn the situation around from one moment to the next. Our weapon as Christians is earnest prayer.

3. Are sanctions, which also affect the population in Russia, a helpful means to stop the war?

The sanctions do not only affect the Russian population, but also the people in the West. We have a cold winter ahead of us. We have to cut back on our consumption. For me, it is worth the sacrifice. At this stage of the Russian despot's intransigence, he understands no other language than the language of sanctions.

4. How can we, as the Evangelical Alliance network, strengthen Christians in Russia to stand up for peace on the ground?

We strengthen them through signs that show people our unconditional love. They deserve the same attention as the Christians in the Ukraine. We are challenged to come up with creative ideas: Writing letters, planning trips, supporting churches financially. I have come to know the Russian Christians as wonderful people with whom I am in contact with, over the telephone, even in these difficult times. I do not try to prove them wrong when they have become victims of one-sided reporting.



Johannes Czwalina is an archaeologist and theologian and worked for ten years as a big-city pastor. He has had his own consulting firm since 1990 and is also the editor of several books on peace and reconciliation issues.

When different worlds collide

As in all families, there were arguments in my father's family. My deeply religious grandmother's motto was: «We don't quarrel, we keep the peace». My mother, on the other hand, addressed conflicts openly. I grew up with different argument cultures. As a mediator, I know that it is not only about resolving disputes, but also about people relating to each other so that change becomes possible.

When I travelled to Morocco at the age of 19, I didn't know how much the interreligious and intercultural encounters would shape me. I got to know different Asian people when I worked for the Salvation Army Foundation in development cooperation. Then I took over responsibility for a programme that conducted dialogue processes with religious-political actors abroad for the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). That's how I got to know international political peace work. The time was formative. I sat with radical monks in southern Thailand, developed projects with religious sisters in Chad and exchanged ideas with Salafists about the future of the Sahel. During these years, I developed the need to consciously acquire the basic attitude of a mediator.

It all depends on how you deal with it

Mediation aims to transform conflicts in the family, between neighbours, in the community or in society into non-violent interactions using appropriate methods. I find inspiration in the Mennonite and mediator Jean Paul Lederach. Like him, I prefer

to call my craft conflict transformation. Transformation means to transform, to reshape, to change. It is not (only) about resolving disputes, but about creating a basis for change.

«In living together with other people, conflicts are inevitable.»

For me, the core of mediation is to ensure that people can enter and remain in dialogue and relationship with each other. An attitude that is useful to the culture of dispute might be: «I don't agree with you. I disagree with you on the matter. Nevertheless, I deal with you in a friendly and appreciative way. As a human being, you have been given inherent dignity by God, no matter what your opinion is. Now I want to understand how you arrive at your attitude.»

For this, it is important to accept that conflicts are normal, that we can deal with them and grow. In living together with other people, conflicts are unavoidable because we have different interests, because there are economic constraints, because we think diversely, because we don't communicate well. The question is: how do we deal with it? Do we sweep the dispute under the carpet because «it's not proper to fight in a community», like my grandmother? Or do we keep fighting until our opponents give up and walk away because «we are right»? Or do we agree to have our dispute in a safe setting?



As a mediator, you never stop learning, because every person, every context is different. Creativity and tradition, other people and faith can be powerful resources. As a mediator, I do not act as an arbitrator, but know that real change comes from the clash of different worlds. My attitude is to approach this process with a compass and a smile.



Anaël Jambers is a certified mediator (SDM) and managing director of Trijalog Mediation und Transformation GmbH. She also serves on the board of the association «versoehnt.ch».

Sustained by faith and blessed with courage

Dag Hammerskjöld was a man who mastered the most impossible challenges of a UN Secretary-General. To this day, he is a role model for successful negotiation and relationship building.

Dag grew up in a wealthy and influential Swedish family. Hjalmar Hammerskjöld, his father, was an outstanding but fearsome civil servant. Especially as Prime Minister of Sweden, he was absent for the most part. Dag learned warmth from his mother Agnes, who also modelled the Christian faith to her children. Only after the publication of Dag's spiritual diary «Thoughts on the Way» did it become clear how much the Christian faith had shaped and sustained him. Dag took over the career from his father. Thus, after studying economics and philosophy, he also worked as a civil servant, first in the Ministry of Finance, then in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It

was there that the young Hammerskjöld first came into contact with the UN, which was also still young, when he was appointed head of the Swedish delegation to the UN.

In 1953, in the midst of great political tensions between East and West, Dag was unexpectedly approached for the post of UN Secretary-General. «To the past: Thanks, to the coming: Yes!», Dag wrote from the bottom of his heart and accepted the challenge. A well-adjusted civil servant was expected. But the young Swede was completely underestimated. Dag unexpectedly gave the world organisation strength and integrity. One of the first tests Hammerskjöld faced was in Beijing. In 1954, China held 15 US pilots in captivity on a charge of espionage in the Korean War, even though the planes had been sent by the United Nations. A delicate situation in which the UN General Assembly condemned China's behaviour and asked Hammerskjöld to negotiate.

Quiet, patient, appreciative

In preparation for the talks, he prescribed himself books on Chinese philosophy and history. During the five-day negotiations, the quiet diplomacy for which Hammerskjöld became known came to the fore. Thanks to his cultural sensitivity, he was able to courageously address the differences. However, he did not hide behind the power structure of the UN, but made a point of being seen as its own voice and not just as its mouthpiece. Once again, Hammerskjöld succeeded in building a trusting relationship with his patient, appreciative manner.

At the end of the talks, China's premier hinted that the American pilots could only be released if it did not look like a surrender by China to America's threat. The solution: let the relatives come to Beijing and then release the prisoners in a humanitarian gesture.

Dag Hammerskjöld travelled back with a certainty that was soon shattered. America banned the relatives from leaving the country, citing superficial security concerns. In July of the same year, on Dag's 50th birthday, the miracle happened. The Chinese premier released the prisoners on the grounds of maintaining friendship with Hammerskjöld (and not with the UN) and wished him a happy birthday. A moving success in his quest for peace, for which he gave God the glory.

Sources:

- Röhlin, Ruth & Karl-Heinz: Dag Hammerskjöld – Mystiker und Politiker. (Dag Hammerskjöld - Mystic and Politician.) Munich, 2005.
- Berggren, Henrik: Dag Hammerskjöld – Das Unmögliche möglich machen. (Dag Hammerskjöld - Making the Impossible Possible.) Urachhaus/Geistesleben, 2017.



Dag Hammerskjöld, appointed 2nd UN General Secretary in 1953.



Pascale Leuch was Media and Communications Intern at the Swiss Evangelical Alliance SEA until October 2022.

Conflicts do not stop at church doors either

A recent survey by the Swiss Evangelical Alliance SEA shows that almost half of the churches surveyed have experienced tensions in connection with the Covid 19 pandemic in recent years. Many have coped well with these tensions. Nevertheless, rifts remain in some places. SEA supports churches in conflict management with a guide.

Two and a half years after the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, SEA's second survey focuses on conflicts and their resolution.¹ It is no secret that the government measures, the vaccination issue or the assessment of the danger of the virus have also caused tensions and even considerable disputes in the churches here, as well as in society as a whole. Of the 343 churches and congregations participating in the survey, almost half perceived tensions due to the pandemic. However, a number of responses also express that developments in recent years cannot be attributed to the pandemic alone. Tensions had already existed before, albeit on other issues, or the crisis had only made visible or intensified what was already latent.

A good quarter of the churches with tensions perceive that they have already been dealt with. For example, reconciliation services have been held, sermons have dealt with it or discussion forums have been organised. This shows that there is a lot of expertise in dealing with reconciliation in the

churches. At the same time, half of the leaders say that they wanted external support for a reconciliation process in view of the conflict in their church. One in 20 churches had already started a facilitated process with external support at the time of the survey.

A guide that shows steps towards reconciliation

The survey results confirm that in quite a few churches there is a need to reach out to each other and take steps towards reconciliation. However, reconciliation cannot be demanded. Those involved must want to take this step, because it is exhausting and requires humility, admitting one's own mistakes and limitations.

Conflicts can also never be solved according to a certain pattern. Circumstances, people, and their histories differ. So it is important to address tensions and conflicts individually and in their context.

At the request of the SEA, Marcus Weiand and Anaël Jambers have produced a guide.² In the sense of an orientation guide, it is intended to support churches and congregations in naming and overcoming rifts that have arisen. Their proposal was further developed by pastors and conflict counsellors from different denominations. Based on the escalation level model of Friedrich Glasl, the guide with simple questions serves as an instrument to clarify through self-assessment how far the conflict has progressed and when external help is appropriate.



The aim of the guide was to promote understanding that conflicts are normal in communities and that proactive, good management is possible and desirable.



Anaël Jambers is a certified mediator (SDM) and managing director of Trijalog Mediation und Transformation GmbH. She also serves on the board of the association «versoehnt.ch».



Daniela Baumann is Communications Officer of the Swiss Evangelical Alliance SEA.

¹ The survey was conducted from 12 July to 31 August among pastors, ministers and other leaders from Protestant national and free churches. The detailed results are available at www.each.ch/aktuellethemen/coronavirus (in German)

² The guide is available at www.each.ch/aktuellethemen/coronavirus (in German).

«Recreation» – Restoring the new, not the old

If you want to restore something, you assume that something valuable was there and you want to return it to an earlier or original state. The suspicion arises that «everything was better before»; before Corona, before the Ukraine war, or before other devastating events.

But is it possible to recreate the past? We can only live in the present now, even if we dream about the past or look forward to the future. That is why I recommend introducing the term «re-creation». When we restore something, it becomes new in the now. And that can be surprisingly new and different.

From a Judeo-Christian perspective, there is one great promise: «Behold, I make all things new!»¹ By «new», does God renew the existing creation or create a completely new creation? Unfortunately, I cannot deal with this theological tension in just a few lines. What is clear is that this «divine re-creation» will make our creation ingeniously new and that we as Christians can already contribute to this today with a sustainable way of life.

What can «restoration» mean for a broken relationship?

It is a new beginning, which includes consciously processing and concluding the failed relationship phase. Together we dare to make a courageous start into a new relationship phase. One of the most important tools will be mutual forgiveness, from which a new and reconciled togetherness can grow.

What can a «new beginning» mean for the time after Corona?

Honestly reflecting on this time will help: Why did I react surprisingly strongly to a one-sided to extreme formation of opinion? Why does fear come up that surprises me to this extent? «Readjustment» can mean that I get to know myself better and am ready to practise a changed behaviour – that is, to evaluate crises from the learned «readjustment».

What can a «readjustment» mean for the war in the Ukraine?

Philosophising about this hardly makes sense. Recently, I had opportunities to have dinner with various Ukrainians. Giving them a listening ear, welcoming them into our parlour, pausing and praying with them – these are moving moments for me in which we strengthen together our adherence to the possibility of a comprehensive «readjustment».

Let us dare a «re-conversion» in different moments and stages of life!

This will ask us: How can I tackle new things based on values that were important to me before? In this sense, I invite you to «restore the new» and to go into the future with hope. Together we can do better!



Beat Ungricht has been married to Bea for 35 years and is the father of three grown-up children. In addition to being President of the Swiss Evangelical Alliance SEA, he works in the leadership of Viva Church Switzerland (formerly Chrischona Switzerland) and is a chaplain in the Swiss army.

¹ Isa 65:17; Rev 21:5.

Literature recommendations



Reimer, Johannes: Where Reconciliation is at Home.

The Church as centre of reconciliation. 2020, Werdewelt Verlags- und Medienhaus (Werdewelt Publishing and Media House), ISBN 978-3-9821461-1-9.



Lederach, John Paul: From Conflict to Reconciliation.

Dream boldly - act pragmatically. 2016, Neufeld Verlag (Neufeld Publishing), ISBN 978-3-86256-068-4.

Changing the world? This is what we sometimes want to do, given the tensions and conflicts in family, society, and politics. The authors help to understand conflicts better. And with exciting accounts of experiences and comprehensive practical instructions, they encourage us to take concrete steps on the path to reconciliation – the path to new freedom. Johannes Reimer and John Paul Lederach unfold from their personal experience and professional international commitment what it means to be sent by Jesus Christ as an ambassador of his reconciliation. A message that wants to reconcile people with God and with each other. If we really start to put this into practice, the world will reflect more and more resemblance to the Kingdom of God.



Volf, Miroslav: Free – giving and forgiving in a merciless culture. 2012, Brunnen Verlag (Brunnen Publishing), ISBN 978-3-76551-185-1.

lence, snatching what we want. But how do we find a life beyond revenge or retributive justice? How do we find our way out of the land of ego-centricity and into that of generosity? In his perceptive analysis, Miroslav Volf follows in the footsteps of Paul and Martin Luther. He exposes the destructive mechanisms of our fallen world and explains why we can learn from God – the great giver and provider – how to live a successful life. A book that impresses with its theological depth as well as its great comprehensibility.

In our culture, the one who gives is equally the loser as the one who forgives. In order not to take risks, we often choose the buying mode or even the path of vio-



Czwilina, Johannes/ Callori di Vignale, Christina: Peace is possible. Secrets of successful reconciliation processes. 2021, Frankfurt Academic Press, ISBN 978-3-86983-026-1.

Above all, they have studied the talks and negotiations and looked closely at their protagonists. One example is Nelson Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk, whose vitae and conversational encounters in the early 1990s led to a model of coexistence between different ethnic groups and the abolition of apartheid. How did this happen? What preconditions, what characteristics were essential for this on both sides of the previous separation and struggle? The authors derive a detailed profile of requirements from the analysis of successful peace processes.

Johannes Czwilina and Christina Countess Callori di Vignale have studied some of the great peace agreements of the 20th century from different directions.

**«The ministry of reconciliation
is a fundamental value of the
Gospel message.»**

