

Articles

SCIENCE-AND-RELIGION/SPIRITUALITY/THEOLOGY DIALOGUE: WHAT FOR AND BY WHOM?

by K. Helmut Reich

Abstract. In recent years the science-and-religion/spirituality/theology dialogue has flourished, but the impact on the minds of the general public, on society as a whole, has been less impressive. Also, religious believers and outspoken atheists face each other without progressing toward a common understanding. The view taken here is that achieving a more marked impact of the dialogue would be beneficial for a peaceful survival of humanity. I aim to argue the why and how of that task by analyzing three possible purposes of the dialogue and their logical interdependence, suggest conceivable improvements of the quality and extent of the current efforts toward a negotiated action plan, and consider an enlargement of the circle of the actors involved. The dialogue that has been carried on between science and religion/spirituality/theology could be expanded and usefully applied to some major problems in the present world.

Keywords: actors; art involvement; humanity's present situation; method; objectives; participants; purpose; science-religion/spirituality/theology dialogue

HUMANITY'S PRESENT SITUATION

For a given treatment to be effective, it must be based on a correct diagnosis. Varadaraja V. Raman has condensed and formulated vitally important aspects of humanity's present situation better than I could, and I present it here in a slightly abbreviated version:

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Science and religion are two of the loftiest expressions of the human spirit. Both have enhanced the human experience in remarkable ways and enriched human culture. Both inject life with meaning, joy and understanding. Every culture has added to the heritage of the human family in these matters. *Religions* have presented us with opportunities for recognizing transcendental reality through its various modes, and also induced us to actualize our innate potential for all that is good and noble. *Science* has not only provided us with knowledge and deeper understanding of the world, but also enabled us to apply that knowledge and understanding for eliminating poverty and hunger, and for the betterment of the human condition. Yet, we live in a world where hatred and wars and threats of doom hang as dark clouds over human destiny. Intrinsically, we feel insecure about the human condition.

It is not only sad, but also paradoxical that with all the spiritual, cultural, and knowledge enrichment that religion and science have given us, the saga of our species is sullied with countless episodes of conflict and confrontation, animosity and aggression. Internal peace and external harmony seem to be all too elusive. Both science and religion have played their roles in dragging us to this state. As to *religion's* role, the otherwise ennobling doctrinal roots of practically every religion tend to include a rigid assertion to the effect that its own prophet and path for the Beyond are the only ones that are to be accepted, and that those subscribing to other systems deserve neither recognition nor continuance. This is perhaps not unlike the thesis that a particular system of government (democracy or communism or whatever) is the best there is, and must be imposed on all the peoples of the world, by force or fright.

Another major cause of wars and conflicts is related to matters of social and global justice. Nature has distributed material resources—fertile lands, fresh water, rainfall, minerals and such—as unevenly as God had endowed intelligence and good fortune among His creatures. Human ingenuity has exploited these in different regions of the world with varying degrees of efficiency and success. In addition, they have also been exploiting fellow humans within every society, and alien people as well, of other races and religions. The greed implicit in this last aspect of economic development and the resentment it provokes are at the root of many wars.

It is a Biblical saying that man (and woman) does not live by bread alone, but this is true only as long as the oft-derided material needs are satisfied. Economic exploitation, social injustice, and misdistribution of wealth, all hallmarks of civilizations, have often deprived many people of the basic necessities of life. But now, thanks to communication technology, this secret has been brought into the open, and the have-nots have enough power to fight nationally and internationally economic injustice.

What all this means is that two conditions are essential for international peace and harmony: The religions of the world should wake up to enlightened visions of tolerance, and global economic systems should treat equitably all the peoples of the world. It seems unlikely that there will be peace and goodwill in the world as long as there are (i) unconscionable disparities between the rich and the poor, and (ii) mindless fanatics, heartless exploiters, and ruthless politicians exploiting all this. In the meanwhile, the most we can do is to plead for understanding, wish for goodwill, and pray for peace. (Raman 2007)

While I agree with all of the measures Raman advocates and am full of admiration for all persons young and old who carry on this dialogue competently and with much engagement (for example, Vogelsang and Meisinger 2008), I propose here to elaborate on the plea for understanding. A

full treatment would need an interdisciplinary effort comparable to that of the recent collaboration between the Vatican and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (Russell 1988–2002). One of the points to be considered is that human beings at present are not endowed with sufficient biological self-restraining mechanisms (which is apparent from wanton warring, overfishing, overgrazing, air pollution, global warming, and so on), and rationality alone seems to be unable to make up fully for that shortcoming. Paul Hawken (2007) has more trust in the beneficial effects of worldwide social movements. Although their long-term effectiveness remains to be seen, it seems worthwhile to explore that route, given the critical situation in which humankind finds itself that includes job, energy, water, and food scarcity.

On a more formal side, I wish to extend *religion* to *religion/spirituality/theology*, or RST, in order to take fully into account these three related yet different human involvements.

PURPOSE OF THE DIALOGUE AND ENHANCING ITS CHANCES FOR SUCCESS

As to the purpose of the dialogue—the *What for?*—three pure choices come to mind, although in practice some mixing occurs: (1) *clarification* (via research and intellectual debate) of the respective roles of the two major approaches to world's/life's nature, demands, and meaning that science and RST represent as well as the specifics of their interaction over time and space; (2) *capturing the interest* of a larger public; and (3) the *spreading of suitable dialogue results* with a view to improving the life of individuals and communities, even of society as a whole, by getting everyone involved.

(1) is well under way, and not only in ESSSAT; (2) is being pursued actively, for instance by IRAS; (3), in my eyes at present the most important purpose, is barely up and running—for example, *The [British] Science and Religion in Schools Project* (Brooke and Rogers 2006). Clearly, the three are dependent on each other: (1) refined by (2) serves as basis for (3). This interdependence points to a way for making the dialogue more effective.

Whereas (1) and (2) are here dealt with circumscribedly (yet adequately, it is hoped), a major emphasis is on (3) because so much less is written about it. This involves not only substantive academic issues about the contents of the dialogue but also issues of its management, good governance, and even politics. Also, involving everyone does not mean to include all views, with a really watered-down result. Rather, in order to articulate a view that could resonate broadly, one has to listen to all views and incorporate whatever parts of them are persuasive. Thus, a major aim of the enterprise is to raise awareness of where individual contributions or contributions from a given discipline fit into an overarching interdisciplinary scheme rather than which particular monolithic scheme leads to the unique and complete solution of all problems already referred to. No completeness of

the remedial measures proposed is claimed; further considerations are hoped for. Philip Hefner (2008) has already pointed out additional hurdles and how to deal with them.

Clarification, and Overcoming Hurdles in Dialogue's/Negotiation's Way. All starts with and is based on (1), so obviously it is vital that the related inputs and results are as reliable, wide-ranging, and deep going as possible (Attfield 2006; Bulkeley 2005; Clayton and Simpson 2006; Deane-Drummond 2006; Fischer 2007; Grassie 2008; Jackelén 2006; Küng [2004] 2007; Lisi 2008; Lorimer 2004; Murphy and Stoeger 2007; Ruse 2005; Shults 2006). Ideally, this involves formulating all research results, including those of religious/spiritual research, in scientific terms, interpreting all findings in a common framework, and considering their impact on the current conceptualizations and worldviews (Reich 2007).

A precondition for this is that the dialogue climate be as open and constructive as imaginable. As the approach in recent books, for instance by Richard Dawkins (2006), Daniel Dennett (2006), and Sam Harris (2006), and the responses to them show, an open "objective" dialogue on a level playing field is not yet an established custom (Giberson and Artigas 2007; Guillebaud 2007; Haught 2008; Shirmer 2007). How can progress toward this objective be furthered? Clearly, creating mutual respect and even trust is needed for progress not only with "our" dialogue but also worldwide for peaceful living together (such as in Afghanistan, Georgia, Iraq, Kashmir, Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and between Palestinians and Israelis). This puts the emphasis on methods.¹

Translating the foregoing remarks into the science-and-RST dialogue/negotiation means recognizing the following:

1. There need to be meetings where *all* views are represented and can be expressed freely, are being listened to, and are accepted according to the evidence presented (no unjustified watering-down).

2. Different disciplines have differing methods to weigh evidence. The basic assumption needs to be that one size does not fit all and to recognize the respective discipline-specific approaches in order to do justice to quite different categories of human experience. Enlarging somewhat the domain under discussion, we observe a curious inconsistency in the following example. No one would contest that there are great musical composers and unmusical, "earless," persons, or great painters and color-blind persons, and no one would entrust the evaluation of the former to the latter. However, already when it comes to introspection in consciousness research (Lorimer 2004, for example), and even more when the issue is deep religious/spiritual experiences, such differences in giftedness are ignored or contested and the results achieved by the specially gifted/trained depreciated notably with the argument that they are not reliable or reproducible and therefore do not deserve recognition. Even if it is more difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff in the latter two cases (introspective

consciousness research and religious/spiritual experiences), that fact alone is no reason to claim that no genuine wheat exists.

3. While the major load needs to be carried by the various experts, the presence of an interested public has at least the following advantages: It forces the experts to express themselves simply and clearly; it brings to their notice questions and preoccupations they may not have been aware of (such as the recent negative reactions to [different] considerations by Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI,² and Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury,³ largely due to misunderstanding of [too] subtle arguments) and thereby helps to prepare them for the subsequent tasks (2)—capturing the interest of a larger public—and (3)—spreading the results and getting everyone involved. And, to be fully authentic and persuasive, for many people the input needs to be enriched by personal testimony, such as in the works by Karen Armstrong (2004), Jean-Claude Guillebaud (2007), John Haught (2006), and Francis Collins (2007).

A specific hurdle for the current dialogue concerns issues of ontology and epistemology. We do not seem to have progressed much beyond the contradictory ontologies of Parmenides and Heraclitus except that the battle is now between the block universe (total and atemporal spacetime continuum) and a temporal universe of true becoming. Should we not reconsider the relationship between ontology, traditionally given a higher priority, and epistemology (Allen 2006; Atmanspacher 2007; Polkinghorne 2006b)? It seems to me that part of the problem is, on the one hand, the ill-conceived desire to establish a hierarchy between those two concepts and, on the other, to make do with a single “narrow” universal solution. Specifically, have not human concerns to do with expressive language as well as with propositional language? Also, for other reasons, it appears indispensable for progress to discuss most issues in terms of levels/pie slices of explanation (contextual relevance), to determine in each case the necessity/sufficiency of a given level/slice for the neighboring level/slice (intercontextual relations), and to work on the basis of a mutual interaction between epistemology and ontology (Clarke 2005; Clayton 2008; McGrath 2005; Velmans 2008).

Similarly, the issue of the logic to be applied is usually not thematized. The default solution is to insist implicitly on formal binary (symbolic) logic. In the West it has a long tradition from Aristotle onward and is often used as the acid test for the validity of a chain of arguments or a conclusion. It also underlies the often-used taxonomy *conflict*, *independence*, *dialogue*, and *integration* for the relation between science and RST (Barbour 1990, 4–30). Now, binary logic certainly has validity in computer programming, devising access controls, solving crossword puzzles, and even restricted issues in quantum mechanics (Boolean algebra) and other cases where a single, fixed, clearly determined solution exists. However, that is not necessarily true for all issues in the science-and-RST dialogue (or in

quantum mechanics, where working out the overall result requires non-Boolean algebra). Rather, there are cases in which applying a trivalent context-sensitive logic leads to more satisfactory results (Reich 2002); in one context, science will explain more of a given explanandum, in another, RST. In all cases of legitimate concern, both approaches are needed to get to the best explanation.

To generalize: Logic as such does not ensure the solution; it is a tool. The mental tool has to match the structure of the specific task or problem at hand, and therefore a range of mental tools is required to tackle various structurally differing issues (Reich 2002, chap. 5; 2003a).

A further hurdle is that the particular conceptualization of the Transcendent/the Numinous (God, for believers of Abrahamic religions) can make or break a fruitful dialogue (Reich 2000). If the Transcendent is taken to cause and continually determine completely all there is, there is no room for a self-organizing nature affirmed by science. Conversely, if the Transcendent is said to be completely recognizable and its existence incontrovertibly provable from studying nature, a theologically blind alley has been entered into, and progress is stopped (Polkinghorne 2006a).

As to religious/spiritual experience, as such it not only could be a source of deeper insights but also could help in coming to an understanding of religious/spiritual reality and possibly of the Transcendent/the Numinous as an absent present (*deus absconditus*). Such an understanding has been described by the Buddha, Lao Tse, Paul of Tarsus, and Zoroaster, among others (Leidhold 2008). Religious/spiritual experience as so understood is *sui generis*—it seizes the deepest part of the consciousness and thereby differs from other forms of experience such as sensuous experience and self-experience. However, that difference is not generally recognized and therefore cannot be much relied on as an argument in the dialogue. Also, the work of some religious and spiritual communities to help persons having religious experiences to avoid drawing undue conclusions is underappreciated.

Yet another hurdle is the tendency to reject early on, without serious examination, “unwelcome” ideas and even facts. Admittedly, charlatans and even forgers exist in almost all disciplines, but that is no reason to reject new ideas from the start. Think, for instance, of the resistance to the ideas of Rupert Sheldrake (2005), and the refusal by anthropologists and economists to take into account the impact of cultural differences (for example, Harrison and Huntington 2000). Also note the marked absence of sociologists in our dialogues (for whatever reasons—see Northcote 2007 for a counterexample). Clearly, striving to introduce or at least establish the fruitfulness of new ideas or procedures, as a rule, is not easy.⁴

Apart from seeking to overcome these hurdles, one upshot for (1) is that the horizon of the dialogue needs to be enlarged in view of the applicability of the results to (2), capturing the interest of a larger public, and (3), spreading of suitable dialogue results and getting everyone involved.

Involving the Public. As regards (2) and (3), the involvement of the general public is clearly indispensable. Maybe the science-and-RST dialogue needs to become more aware of the zeitgeist in this respect. Is it not true that in the age of blogs (for example, <http://www.transmission-x.com/luz/2007/10/27/luz-episode-1>), use of privately taken cell phone pictures in public newscasts, television calls for viewers' opinions, and so forth, many persons feel entitled to participate in the determination of the future and are ready to invest themselves (Hawken 2007)? A welcome step in that direction is the insertion of public sessions into experts' meetings. For the green-inspired *Focus the Nation*, a national teach-in to involve more persons (here in the prevention of climate change) and reactions to it view <http://inside.highered.com/news/2008/01/17/environment>, and for a science-and-religion initiative by religious congregations (to discuss the compatibility of religion and science) consult <http://www.evolutionweekend.org>. It is right and proper to go to the scientists and science students as well as to the churches and show what can be done with the dialogue between the two disciplines, how it can enlighten our religious or scientific thinking.

What may also be helpful as a further step to achieve (3) could be relevant sessions at UNESCO (or even UNO) conferences, the Davos World Economic Forum (specifically the Public Forum), or the World Social Forum, or perhaps a channel at YouTube.com—as was recently created by Queen Rania of Jordan to improve knowledge about the Arab world—and so on, the long-term aim being an appropriate mass movement encouraged by various institutions and social groupings (examples: Amnesty International, Association Chrétienne pour l'Abolition de la Torture [ACAT]).

Clearly, and not only in my view, there will be no peace or saving of the environment unless major issues of the science-and-RST dialogue have been settled satisfactorily and the results accepted worldwide: to consider that the world population is at bottom a community of common values and interests that need to be developed for peaceful survival.

An example of a transformation of a situation characterized by indifference if not disdain may be helpful here. In Singapore, formerly separate-living Chinese, Indonesians, and Malays now, despite ethnic and religious differences, feel like Singaporeans, sharing an active common interest in their future. Clearly, commonalities have to be emphasized over against differences. Not that the latter should be swept under the carpet, but they should not be put exclusively into the limelight, either. In fact, learning how to discuss differences factually and calmly is indispensable in our multifaceted world, as is the capacity to collaborate effectively with persons whose basic convictions one does not share. A step forward may be to adapt the *way of communicating* one's views to the characteristics of the person(s) one is facing while maintaining one's position (until shown to be mistaken).

However, let me not paint too naive or idealistic a picture. Given that we live in a multicultural, multireligious world, success in this enterprise is

not guaranteed. Even if there were agreement on aims, there would likely be disagreement about the means. And who has the authority, the competence, and the means to lead such a debate? Maybe only a grass-roots movement can bring forth success.

THE ACTORS

The actors, the *by whom*: Traditionally, (1) [clarification] engages (mostly university-educated) experts; (2) [capturing the interest of a larger public] adds the general educated public, and (3) [spreading of suitable dialogue results and stimulating involvement] concerns everyone. As already mentioned, in order to articulate a view advocated here that could resonate broadly, I suggest that “everyone” should be involved much earlier in that process than previously. This also corresponds to the zeitgeist and is already the case in other domains such as the preservation of peace, social justice, and/or the environment (Hawken 2007), the interpretation of history (at least in Germany; see Große Kracht 2005), or dealing with the consequences of globalization.

We live in an age of ever more narrow specialization and increased competition, yet also in a media culture with demands of professional public relations performance. It is not easy to prevail in that melee. Not only is serious knowledge required but also didactic competence and philosophical street-fighter qualities—not to mention humor. In the day-to-day struggle, this effort occasionally may need to employ a detour, such as the prophet Nathan used to get King David to the insight that he had done wrong and needed to mend his ways (2 Samuel 12:1–13; Reich 2003b). How does one learn these things? Maybe there should be pertinent pre-conference workshops, if nothing else.

Conceivably, (3)—and maybe (2)—asks for additional actors. Here I think, for instance, of various artists. Why? Because those in the general public seem to know (and care) little about, and do not conduct their lives or construct/mold their views upon, knowledge or information relating to controversial or complementary ideas and conceptualizations that are exchanged and debated in the forums, books, and articles devoted to our dialogue. Clearly, a different approach is needed to make headway. What got the public discussion about the Sho’ah going in Germany years after the facts were known and had been documented in nonfiction books and documentary pictures? It was the Hollywood movie *Holocaust* by Marvin J. Chomsky, which depicted the fate of a particular family, the Weisses. As is well known to anyone who has tried to involve “everyone,” finding out how to put something over to newcomers and achieving that aim may require an effort comparable to that needed for acquiring the contents of that message in the first place. Chomsky translated an indigestible mass of horrible facts and statistics into the everyday lives of a graspable number of interacting persons with whom the spectator could react. Or take the ex-

ample of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). Through his creative imagining of the story of a father and his son, the precision and eloquence of his descriptions, and sustained captivation by the story, this author conjures up a postapocalyptic future. In contrast, Paul H. Carr (2006) has written engagingly about beauty in nature, in science, in technology, and in RST. In yet another category are the illustrated children's stories about our universe and life by Jennifer Morgan and Dana Lynne Andersen.

It seems to me that there is much material for advancing (3) in one form or another. It also helps when a social movement features a symbol everyone associates it with (see Deacon 2006). And remember *Sophie's World*, the novel by Jostein Gaarder (1994), which combines a mysterious plot with a basic guide to philosophy? Or think of the travel adventure books by Karl May (total copies: 200 million), devoured since generations by many children and adolescents, in which Old Shatterhand in America and Kara Ben Nemsî in the Middle East between gripping adventures have serious discussions about Amerindian religion, Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism, respectively. And there is the theater play *The Physicists*, a grotesque comedy written by Swiss author Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1964), which features Albert Einstein and Isaac Newton. Nothing forbids turning some of the corresponding efforts pertaining to (3) into entertaining books, DVDs, and movies. Physicist and lay reader in the Church of England Russell Stannard (<http://www.counterbalance.net/bio/stann-body.html>) to some extent has shown the way with his books and his four twenty-minute videos (produced by the BBC), *The Question Is . . .*, which deal with the relationships between science and religion for young people. So, we clearly want to involve writers and artists to further (3).

To avoid misunderstanding, the move to involve artists on the one hand, and everybody on the other, is not necessarily a panacea. Let me close this section with one example not to be taken as a model in its entirety, followed by a more positive example. The multiply awarded 2004 film *What the Bleep Do We [k]now!?* (read "What the bleep do we [k]now!?"), directed by William Arntz, Betsy Chasse, and Mark Vicente, makes strong claims about its factual excellence and its beneficial impact. As already the fanciful choice of the characters in the title (upper/lower case, Latin/Greek) indicates, this "mind-bending" work claims to open the spectator's eyes to new possibilities. The directors explain that science and spirituality come together in new and enlightening ways via interviewing experts, notably of quantum physics, neuroscience, and theology (including by members of the camera crew), interpreting the results, and interspersing biographical details of a deaf woman photographer's struggle with life as well as a Polish wedding. After having exposed myself for about 2-1/2 hours to this adventure (including the DVD's additional material), I agree with the overwhelmingly negative responses posted on the Internet (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/What_the_Bleep_Do_We_Know%21%3F), for instance (condensed):

“A beautiful visual style, exciting graphic effects, a bombardment of the viewer with multisensory imagery, but I cannot find anyone respected in the field who is standing behind this film. The experts were interviewed for hours, but only rather short extracts were incorporated, it seems mainly those that fitted Rhamta’s School of Enlightenment (not so stated explicitly by the directors).” One can admire the vision, the creativity, the energy, and even the ambitions of the filmmakers, and the intense discussions triggered in audiences by the film are remarkable, but my opinion is “Yes” to multisensory imagery (where it belongs) and involving everyone, but not in the service of a one-sided message that misuses science.

And now to the positive example, an unassuming recent two-day meeting of the Focolare on long-lasting, satisfying marital relationships that took place at Baar in central Switzerland. (The Focolare is a worldwide ecumenical movement striving to revive the spirit, the attitude, and above all the beneficial actions of the early Christians in the family and in the economy; see Bruni [1999] 2002). Expert couples presented the science aspects, inspired by communication theory, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, and the late Chiara Lubich (one of the founders of the movement in 1944) brought to life the religion/spirituality side by way of spiritual video messages. There were plenary sessions for dialogues of the participating 140 married couples with the presenters and private sessions for personal exchanges between spouses. Fifteen recommendations were presented and justified as to the desirable nature of these exchanges, and four themes suggested: (1) What do I appreciate in my spouse? (2) What could be improved? (3) What do I expect from my spouse? (4) What are, individually or jointly, our apprehensions, doubts, and fears? There were breaks with classical and sacred music. In a session toward the end of the meeting each participant was invited to note on a slip of paper one insight that was especially helpful for him or her, and all of these were read aloud, thus providing immediate feedback on how others felt about the enterprise. Of course, this was not a neutral undertaking; it had a religious base. However, in contrast to the film, the scientific aspects were given a sympathetic full hearing, all participants had the opportunity to voice their questions, critique, objections, and agreements (orally or in writing), and a large majority of participants thought that the participation had been beneficial.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Both science and RST can potentially contribute to the amelioration of problems in humanity’s current situation, especially if they recognize each other and collaborate closely and each is supported in what it does best. Science (and economics) can fight illness, hunger, and poverty, and RST can provide meaning and additional motivation as well as potentially harmonize the two sexes, contemporaneous generations, reason and emotions, body and spirit, ethics and action, life stages, the temporalities (past, present,

future), private and public life, individuals and those around them, nature and culture, the human community and the cosmos (Saroglou 2006). Both together provide knowledge about the world and beyond and potentially can help to take appropriate action. The task of the science-and-RST dialogue is to clarify and detail these potentialities and spread the results, ideally worldwide, in view of actions that would benefit humanity's survival. To do so requires an opening up of present activities, a reorientation toward some kind of nonprofit marketing, and the building up of a worldwide learning and collaborating community that includes everyone, a community that broadens and applies new insights as well as modes of behavior and action.

NOTES

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1. Although it does not happen often ("Not invented here!"), could the dialogue/negotiation we are discussing learn from experiences made elsewhere, in other fields? Living in Switzerland since 1955 but not being a Swiss citizen, I may be allowed to use the case of Switzerland as an illustration of what is conceivable or possible in terms of openness and inclusiveness. (But remember the purpose in our case: to articulate a view that could resonate broadly, not a really watered-down one.) In Switzerland, a very basic tenet is to include everyone not only in political decision making but also in its elaboration. The federal and state governments are traditionally coalition governments composed of all major political parties, law proposals are widely circulated for consultation, and through direct democracy (referenda, law-proposing initiatives) the voters codetermine almost all political decisions. This works well because in the course of their history (most of) the Swiss have become quite rational/pragmatic.

This is not to say wise, as in recent referenda they *declined*, for instance, (a) to lower the number of working hours, (b) to finance health insurance by raising the contributions of the "rich," and (c) to reconstruct the finances of the state retirement insurance by injecting the proceeds from the gold sales by the Swiss National Bank (measures partly adopted elsewhere in Europe), the argument being in all cases that the proposed measures would be counterproductive in the long term. Another example: In the peace treaty of Westphalia of 1648, Switzerland was granted—and accepted—"almost independence" from the Holy Roman Empire (ruled by the Hapsburgs at the time), which included the continuing "occupation" of some small Hapsburg-reigned territories inside Switzerland. (If more inhabitants of the Middle East or of Kosovo, etc., or even fanatic debaters, would have that attitude, peaceful coexistence would be that much easier). Have the gentle, synoptic ways of Pier Luigi Lisi (2008) perhaps been influenced by his working thirty years in Switzerland?

Or, not to limit myself to Switzerland, take the status of Hong Kong, governed under the principle of "one country, two systems." (Why was a similar solution not negotiated in the case of Kosovo?) Such a practically minded attitude can also be illustrated by the two ways to turn a tropical forest into agricultural land: (1) Clear systematically all trees, however difficult it is and how long it takes, then (later by maybe a year or more) saw and harvest. (2) Look for patches with less dense natural cover, clear them, saw immediately and harvest, and go on in that way until (years later) most of the forest is cleared. (2) is intellectually and aesthetically less satisfying, but from the beginning harvesting some food is in sight.

2. On Tuesday, 12 September 2006, Pope Benedict XVI, in the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, gave a lecture titled "Faith, Reason and the University. Memories and Reflections" (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html). In this lecture Prof. Ratzinger referred to the dialogue carried on—perhaps in 1391—by the erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity and Islam, and the truth of

both. The Pope said, "Without descending to details [concerning holy war according to the Qur'an], such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the 'Book' and the 'infidels', he [the emperor] addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness that we find unacceptable, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: 'Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.' The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul."

Viewed by a neutral reader (of the English translation, which does not necessarily fully reflect the German original), did the Pope not use this quotation to show that (1) the discussion about faith and reason is not recent, (2) in the Greek philosophical tradition, not to act in accordance with reason is contrary to God's nature, and (3) in Islam God's will would seem not to be bound up with any of our categories, even that of rationality—all this while distancing himself [the Pope] from the emperor's brusqueness? How was the worldwide reaction to this university lecture? In one sentence: "This is an insulting mischaracterization of Islam by Benedict XVI!" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope_Benedict_XVI_Islam_controversy) Anybody interested in the many examples can find plenty of details online. The conclusion is that, contrary to the intended invitation for a reflected forward-looking discussion of faith and reason, an unfortunate backlash resulted.

3. On Thursday, 7 February 2008, Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan Williams gave the foundation lecture at the Royal Courts of Justice in London on "Civil and Religious Law in England: a Religious Perspective" (<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1575>). Dr. Williams's objective was, *inter alia*, "to tease out some of the broader issues around the rights of religious groups within a secular state, with a few thoughts about what might be entailed in crafting a just and constructive relationship between Islamic law and the statutory law of the United Kingdom." There followed a wide-ranging (and subtle) detailing of that intention, followed by: "In conclusion, it seems that if we are to think intelligently about the relations between Islam and British law, we need a fair amount of 'deconstruction' of crude oppositions and mythologies, whether of the nature of 'sharia' or the nature of the Enlightenment. But as I have hinted, I do not believe this can be done without some thinking also about the very nature of law. It is always easy to take refuge in some form of positivism; and what I have called legal universalism, when divorced from a serious theoretical (and, I would argue, religious) underpinning, can turn into a positivism as sterile as any other variety. If the paradoxical idea which I have sketched is true—that universal law and universal right are a way of recognising what is least fathomable and controllable in the human subject—theology still waits for us around the corner of these debates, however hard our culture may try to keep it out. And, as you can imagine, I am not going to complain about that."

And how was the public reaction? The lecture was followed by a Question and Answer session (<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1594>). The Lord Chief Justice, Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers (LP), read out questions to the Archbishop, who answered them carefully, yet with frankness. At the end LP said: It is time to draw this discussion, reluctantly, to a close. Could I thank you, Archbishop, for so brilliantly introducing us to this difficult area, for raising questions over which we shall be pondering in the weeks ahead, and for answering all the questions which have been thrown at you in the last half hour? Thank you very much. Tina Bettie commented on the often hostile reactions of the media and the wider public as follows (http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/rowan_williams_sharia_furore_anglican_future): "The furious response to the archbishop's comments reveals a great deal about the hostility and ignorance with regard to Islam which forms a potent undercurrent in Britain's ostensibly multi-cultural society. It is also a reminder—if such reminders are needed—that this is a woefully anti-intellectual society, fed on a daily diet of the tabloid press and reality television, and apparently incapable of engaging in intelligent public debate about significant issues. Serious journalists who ought to know better have derided Williams for being too scholarly; the widespread belief seems to be that he has only himself to blame if people failed to grasp the subtleties of his argument. The logic of this message is that public figures must 'dumb down' or be damned."

4. Could examples from other fields provide inspiration? Approaches that have been used with some success in keeping-the-armistice missions, for instance in Georgia (directed until 2006 by the Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini), could be helpful here: establishing the facts, proceeding by negotiating (small) steps forward, honoring engagements, and allowing every-

one to keep face (and having military or police forces available in case of need). While on the theme of creating acceptance and trust between warring parties, another example is the reconciliation between France and Germany after World War II that ended a two hundred-year-old history of fighting wars against each other. This involved the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, city partnerships, youth exchanges, the working out of common history books, the establishment of a common television program (Arte), and so on. The work of the South African Peace and Reconciliation Commission and similar enterprises also come to mind.

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