

## A Place for God in the TCI World view: Within or Beyond the TCI system?

Reflection on Thomas Abraham's correlation between TCI and Indian Wisdom

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In various articles, Thomas Abraham tries to correlate Indian Wisdom and the TCI world view<sup>1</sup>. One important aspect within this correlation is the importance of God within Indian Wisdom and TCI with its origin in humanism. Thomas Abraham questions if there is a place for God in the TCI world view?

### 1. GOD's place at the top of a pyramid

Based on the Indian experience that all activities of significance like TCI workshops start with a prayer Thomas gives "GOD/SUPREME POWER" a place "at the top of a pyramid where I, We, It and Globe correlate. God's abode is always believed to be up in heaven and not down on the plains. ... "We can visualize the model of a pyramid, which floats in a transparent globe, with the god-point at the top which even we hold it".

Thomas Abraham is well aware of R. Cohn's experience, who "has not assigned a position for God in the manner in which she has assigned positions for I, We, It and Globe in the TCI symbol. The implication is that God permeates the whole system for those who believe in Him. For others there are values which underlie all interactions."<sup>2</sup> Thomas' suggestion for a specific Indian symbolization of TCI seems to be closely related to the mystic experience of Ignatius of Loyola, founder of Jesuits. Ignatius believed that GOD can be found in all things.

### 2. GOD'S beyond

In Communicative Theology, which is a specific „style“ of theologizing reflecting on TCI-Communication as a critical approach of lively communication<sup>3</sup>, a different figure is used. The symbol for GOD is not at the top of the pyramid but at the bottom. In some concepts, which have their origin in psychological research, of religious developments from childhood to adulthood, one can see a change in symbolization the Supreme Power or the Ultimate, like Fritz Oser says. Children imagine the Ultimate like they do with their parents; they imagine GOD like parents at the top. For most adults the Ultimate is at the bottom. They feel to be safe in the "hand" of an Ultimate. With this faith they can live as free subjects.

GOD at the top or at the bottom is not the important difference to Thomas' symbolization. The main difference is that in the figure of Communicative Theology "lines are introduced which go out from the central mystery of God and his self-revelation, so as to touch and go beyond all four dimensions represented by the familiar figure of the triangle-in-a-sphere, which constitutes the TCI-,working tool"<sup>4</sup>. GOD at the top or at the bottom - is never part of the TCI-system, regardless if one believes in GOD or not. TCI-Communication is always a human process and GOD is beyond this process. TCI-facilitators and participants in TCI-groups can be aware of (always ambivalent) symbols like metaphors, parables, signs in

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<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Thomas Abraham, *TCI in India: An Indian's response to its relevance – an analysis of the concept and its application*, *Themenzentrierte Interaktion/theme-centered interaction* 20 (1/2006): 55-64.

<sup>2</sup> Abraham, „TCI in India“, 57.

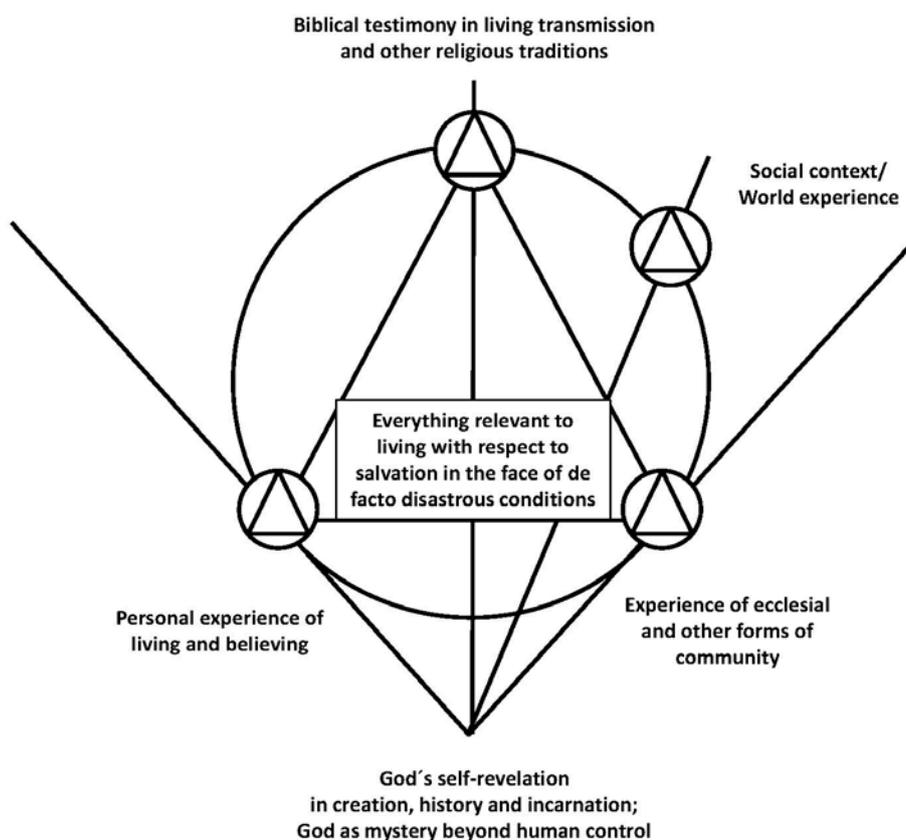
<sup>3</sup> See, among others, Communicative Theology Research Group, *Communicative Theology. Reflections on the Culture of Our Practice of Theology* (Wien-Berlin 2007); Matthias Scharer and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, *The Practice of Communicative Theology. Introduction to a New Theological Culture* (New York 2008); Matthias Scharer, *Kommunikative Theologie in Handbuch Themenzentrierte Interaktion (TZI)* (Göttingen 2009), 217-221.

<sup>4</sup> Communicative Theology Research Group, *Communicative Theology*, 53.

groups and so on, in which someone can rediscover signs/tracks of the ULTIMATE. Mystics demonstrate how one has to let go symbols to turn into total silence and present. The mystic way sometimes experiences a deep darkness in which one can't feel any presence of the ULTIMATE because all (ambivalente) symbols of GOD are destroyed.

In Communicative Theology theologians work on an anthropological-theological understanding of communication including an "option for contemplation and the mystical-mystagogical."<sup>5</sup> This option puts a certain distance between theologians and ... [their] own ideas and systematizations: it constantly reminds ... [them] that ultimately it is the center that counts, namely the reality that we call God, a reality which can never be reduced to 'one element among others in our scheme of things.'<sup>6,7</sup> For this reason TCI factors in Communicative Theology are seen as dimensions in which something divine may encounter in the world. The dimensions are "places" (lat. "Loci") where one can see something of the deeper reality of GOD and mankind.

With the unfeasible and speakable are connected especially experience of deep gratitude, joy and so on. TCI facilitators or participants in groups feel sometimes this gratitude, when TCI Communications in relationships succeed and deep understandings are possible. However, it can also involve experience of unfeasibility and powerlessness: In such a moment TCI-leaders may handover the group from the own hand (have to) to someone or something else „forwards". The distinction between releasing ability of a deep trust in life and the inability to lead a group, are in such moments, of course, very important.



<sup>5</sup> Communicative Theology Research Group, *Communicative Theology*, 113.

<sup>6</sup> Karl Rahner, „*Christian living formerly and today*“ (1966) in *Theological Investigations* vol. VII, Further theology of the spiritual life, trans. By David Bourke (New York 1971), 1-14, here p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Communicative Theology Research Group, *Communicative Theology*, 113. The wording of this option comes essential from Teresa Peter.

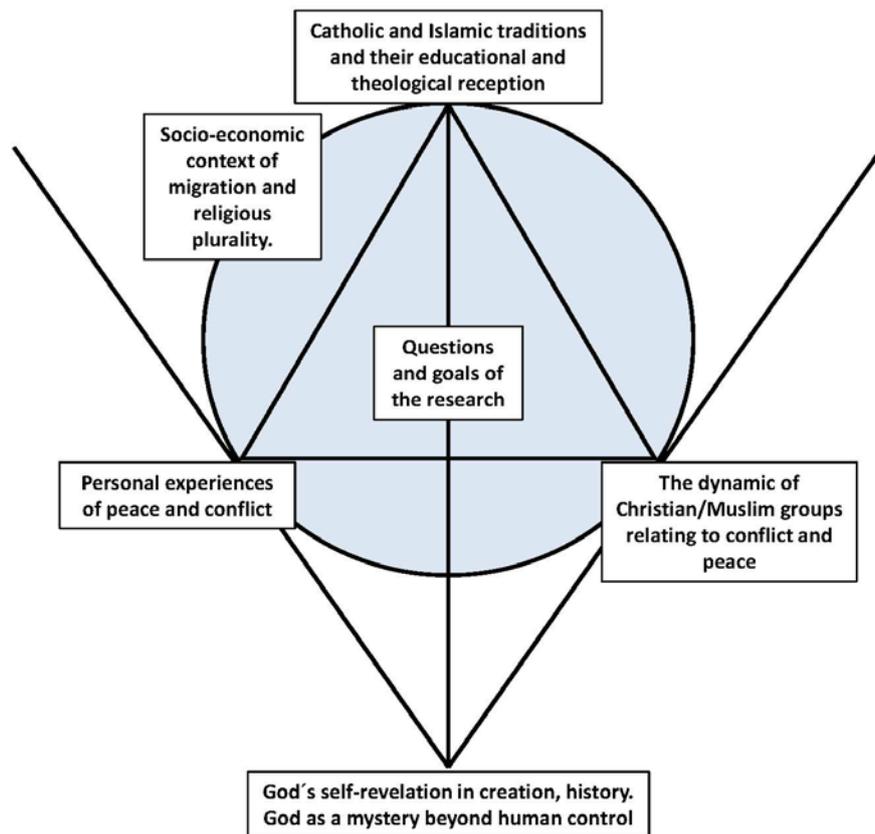
Communicative Theology sees itself firstly as a Christian theological approach. With many other religions, Christians believe that God or the Divine is a mystery beyond any human control. Christians can never exactly know who and how GOD is in reality. If we could recognize the Divine with our concepts and ways of thinking, it would no longer be the Absolute Transcendence, but a part of our earthly reality. Theological insights of GOD are always "analogous". All statements we make about GOD or the DIVINE are human and therefore rather accurate than applicable. They are human understandings, thoughts and our speech about God. Nevertheless, we can speak from GOD in relation to our human experience with the Transcendence. Further, we can try to speak and connect with GOD like people in all religions do when they celebrate ceremonies, read holy texts, sing, pray and so on.

Although Christians hold the view from the uncontrollable mystery of God, they also believe that God communicates with mankind in absolute freedom. Together with Jews and Muslims, they assume that GOD communicates in creation and history of the whole mankind and of every single human being. Christians also believe that the Word of God, had become man of flesh and blood in a special time in history. In Jesus Christ, Christians encounter GOD.

### 3. To enter into inter-religious dialogue

Thomas Abraham's TCI-factor at the top of the pyramid appears as a way to facilitate the dialogue between members from different religions. They could agree on a spirituality and practice, which includes references to various religions. Or it could apply the word spirituality as a collective term for various religious references that people bring into the group. So, that a sense of unity and solidarity between people of different religions that arises beyond theological arguments about truth claims can be felt. Spirituality would be a human and religious unification factor that is inherent to the other TCI factors. Therefore, it brings together even if people communicate and thereby discover something of its spiritual depth, which seems possible, especially in TCI contexts.

Considering from the perspective of Communicative Theology we come to a different conclusion. The insight that GOD's communication is always greater than every concretization in a particular religion or theological knowledge makes it possible to use the practice of Communicative Theology within other religions and its members like Muslims and to use it in very concrete contexts. In a research project with the Research Centre of Islamic Religious Education at the University of Vienna we want to find out "Conflict Areas and Peace Potentials in the Context of the Presence of Christians and Muslims at Schools". In cooperation with Muslim researchers we modified the figure:



Although Communicative Theology has its origin in Christian theology, it offers a specific way of theology that combines the actual reality of life on the one hand, and religious traditions as “loci theologici” on the other hand. Such an approach has already proved to be valuable in order to serve as a dialogical framework. The adaption of this frame for this research project needs a specific consideration for the research partners. In line with the goals, the research frame relates to theological hermeneutics of the multi-religious and secular school reality. Because the research of Religious Education is usually conducted from sociological or pedagogical perspectives, the investigation of school reality from a theological perspective is a methodological innovation. One can expect a better understanding of the religious potentials for conflict or peace that determine the presence of the religions or Religious Education. The diagram shows the dimensions of the concept of Communicative Theology how we use it in a Muslim-Christian research project, taking the consensus and the difference between religions seriously.