

**A NEW THEOLOGICAL CULTURE IN ORDER TO GET A  
DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE RICHNESS OF  
RELIGION AND RELIGIOSITY IN THE MIDST OF  
GLOBAL CULTURAL FLOW**

Matthias Scharer  
*University of Innsbruck, Innsbruck, Austria*

According to my understanding the future of learning religion and religiously learning does not primary depend on new methods or medias transferring faith or religiosity to people's lives. It depends more on a change of theological awareness and of our ways of theologizing in the midst of cultural flow in order to get a deeper understanding of the richness of religion and religiosity in our present time. What "comes from the people" especially in the contexts of interreligious communication can be recognized as a sign of the time, a sign of the Holy Spirit, within a global world. It has an important theological meaning (Hinsdale et al. 1995). The consequences of the insight of L. Boff et al. (1991) that God is present in every human being and in the communities of the people even "before the missionary turns up" are not taken seriously in learning concepts of religion.

For me as an academic theologian who does research in the fields of Religious Education and Practical Theology it is important to collaborate with other disciplines. For more than ten years there is a close cooperation with the professor for dogmatic theology B. J. Hilberath (Tübingen) and the professor of systematic theology B. Hinze at Fordham University (New York). Our main concern is to work out an interdisciplinary hermeneutic approach for understanding communication processes in there theological meaning. We do this by using qualitative empirical methods in order to recognize what is happening in the lives of people (biographical narrations) and also what is happening in specific interaction situations (especially in conflictive ones) or in the context of society, church, or religion. We are working on a Communicative Theology (CT) to establish a new theological culture and a deeper understanding of the communicative and conflictive reality within and between religions (Scharer and Hilberath 2008). At the theological faculty of the University of Innsbruck we are practicing

this culture and understanding in a five- semester post-graduate Master Course that includes global aspects: Learning religion and religious learning needs primarily sensitive and competent persons who are not only able to read and interpret the Bible and other religious testimonies, even though this competence plays an important role. They have also to be educated in the ability to distinguish what is relevant to living with respect to salvation, in the face of de facto disastrous conditions. I try to explain this through an experience in the multi-religious context of India.

**THE CHILDREN OF MAHER AND THEIR COMMON  
PRAYER TO THE ULTIMATE**

One essential part of the mentioned Master Course is the so called "World-Church-Excursion" that leads the participants in small groups to Latin America, Africa, and Asia in order to go through religious experiences in different cultures; in the case of India, also in different religions. My colleague Teresa Peter and I had visited in this context Maher, a project for exploited women and children in Maharashtra.

The origin of Maher is the challenging experience of the Holy Cross Sr. Lucy not to be able to help a woman who was set on fire by her drunken husband. It was then that Sr. Lucy decided that she had to create a home for abused and traumatized women where they could feel secure, cared for, and wanted, irrespective of religion, caste, or social status. Nowadays also children live in Maher. They are either orphans or come from broken homes, often with single parents or rarely with both parents but under financial circumstances that force them to approach Maher.

Every morning the children of Maher are gathering on the big floor of the house. It's very noisy when all together more than eighty children between three and twelve years old are sitting on the floor waiting for the morning address. During our visit in Maher one morning I was sitting in the midst of the children. One of the social workers began with a very simple breathing exercise. Slowly the children became silent. A silent atmosphere began to spread among the children. One child after the other began to pray in his/her own language and according to his/her religion: Hindus, Moslems, Christians of different Confessions prayed side by side and in deep respect and solidarity. They prayed to Krishna, Allah, God, Jesus, the Ultimate... In this moment and among these excluded children a new future of religion

and religiosity began. A new age of religious understanding and a deep awareness between human beings of different religions started to become reality. To appreciate such a situation and to interpret it as a prophetic kairos of religious learning and not as a satanic patchwork of religions needs a specific theological awareness that I try to expand in the next points.

### HOW PEOPLE CAN BE EDUCATED IN KAIROLOGICAL AWARENESS ON RELIGION AND RELIGIOSITY

We are trying to establish in our research and in our teaching the culture of CT. What are our essentials on this way? It's important to recognize that CT was not born on the desk of university professors or in the library. The origins of CT are closely connected with the discomfort experienced by many church workers, particularly those engaged in pastoral work and in teaching of religion in schools, with regard to scientific theology as practiced and taught in theological schools and other scientific institutions; a malaise that often comes to expression in courses of theological training. In the meantime the interreligious context has also become an important context for CT (Kästle et al. 2009; Scharer 2010).

From the very beginning Ruth C. Cohn's Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI) played a significant role in CT as a holistic praxis of communication that includes four factors:

- The "I" as the individual person. This factor is aware of itself and turns to others and to the theme in a given group situation.
- The "We" as the group. This factor represents the relationship of individuals to another and to the theme of their interaction.
- The "It" as a task or as a theme. This factor singles out the topical concerns to be worked out in interaction.
- The "Globe" as environment. This factor influences the group in their relationships and in their working together in both a narrower and in a broader sense.

Ruth Cohn used an equilateral triangle within a sphere in order to show the interconnection of these four factors. In the CT we put the theme at the centre of the triangle.

### THEOLOGY DONE IN AND FROM A LIVING PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

What is the reason for using a humanistic communication approach in our theological enterprise? In the light of God's self-revelation, it would appear theologically meaningful to speak of God as a communicative God and to interpret revelation as a communication process, "in which not mere abstract truths, but rather life itself is communicated. For this reason, revelation so understood includes the whole life of those human beings who listen and respond to it" (Schwager 2003, 27). Thus CT stands in the tradition of recalling God's dealings with humanity and liturgically representing them, but it also stands in the tradition of lamenting God's remaining silent. In this sense, theology as communicative action is not a "productive" action; it remains in the tension between accessibility and inaccessibility on three levels:

- the level of direct involvement,
- the level of experience and interpretation,
- the level of scientific theological reflection.

On every level the four dimensions, which we understand as "loci theologici," are connected:

- the dimension of personal experience of live and faith,
- the dimension of ecclesial and other forms of community in different religions,
- the dimension of biblical testimony in its living transmission and of other religious traditions,
- the dimension of the social context/experience of world.

According to the CT, these levels and dimensions are not only shaped by the aspect of "doing" but also by the aspect of "letting happen." At this point contemplation becomes important. It can be realized in prayer, in celebration, and in mystagogical initiation that are part of this culture of theologizing. The central task of CT is to recognize in the critical, conflict-laden dynamism generated by the cross-linkage of levels and dimensions a dynamic force that is generative for theology.

## IMPLICATIONS

1. The future of learning religion and religiously learning does not mainly depend on persons who are professionally engaged in religion learning processes like pastors, pastoral workers, teachers of religion in schools, and so on. In the very complex process of handing down religion and faith from one generation to another kairological situations play an important role. These situations can also take place in multi-religious settings (like the interreligious situation of the children of Maher).
2. Kairological situations cannot be produced purposely. They originate in the work of the Holy Spirit as we Christians would express it and still they need to be recognized by attentive persons.
3. The research work in interdisciplinary teams and in different cultural and religious settings serves the purpose to work out criteria for a sensitive understanding of religious learning processes in view of what is relevant to life with respect to salvation, in the face of de facto disastrous conditions and violence.
4. In order to be able to do this we need a complex and connected awareness that is not only sensitive and competent for traditional testimonies but also for biographical narrations, for narrations of groups and communities, and for situations that we encounter in our globe of an economic and media influenced society.
5. All this does not primarily happen on the theoretical–reflective level, but also on the level of direct involvement and experience. Someone who is not in touch with religious everyday experiences himself/herself, cannot really understand the interconnectedness of religion and religiously learning. That's why we need a new culture of theologizing in which living learning processes, including the mentioned aspects, can take place.

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Matthias Scharer is professor of Religious Education and director of Institute of Practical Theology at the University of Innsbruck in Innsbruck, Austria. E-mail: matthias.scharer@uibk.ac.at

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