

## **Images of Enmity and Hope: Analyzing and Transforming An Introduction**

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After 9/11, the relationship between religion, conflict and violence has gained enormous public attention, both in academic and in public spheres. The focus of this attention has been mainly on Islam, terrorism and religion-related violence. In the media, images disseminated and became popular about the violent, dangerous and barbaric 'other'. Due to the globalization of information networks local churches and mosques were dealing with the consequences of these portrayals. Images of enmity blocked and is still blocking real communication in the West as well as in the Middle East and North Africa. Muslims in Europe and Christians in Egypt and Syria are facing the impact of the popularity of these images.

Much reflection has been done, both on scientific and practical level. This reflection predominantly has a focus on religion-related violence. In general, three positions concerning religion and (violent) conflict can be identified: the first position reflects on violent conflict as a structural element in religion; the second position argues that religion is used by people or groups to enhance their violent perspective or to justify their violence; the third position describes the positive role of religion in conflict mediation and conflict resolution. These positions do not always contradict.

It is important to note that the role played by religion in conflict situations cannot always be separated from other social issues like ethnicity, culture, poverty, tradition, gender, language or politics. This makes the precise role of religion difficult to comprehend, although this comprehension is an evident part of peace building in conflict areas. More reflection is needed.

It seems to be important that reflections on images of enmity do not only focus on the question how religion relates to violence, but also includes the psychological level. The reality of the enemy outside ourselves has a lot to do with fear, anger, trauma and frustration covered up with religion-related perspectives on otherness. Deep down, our fear for the other is connected with a deep fear for the fierce realities of our own projections. These projections shape for a big deal the realities we create and we live in. The enemy outside and the enemy inside are closely related.

Within this context, religion can built up and break down, neglect, deny or affirm. Religion does nothing that humans cannot do. It filters and creates our realities in such a way that these realities become filled with religious judgments about good and evil. Encircled by these judgments the other human being becomes 'our' enemy. These religious judgments, fed by our religious institutions, our doctrines and holy texts, can create an enemy out of every human being. However, even this threatening fearful enemy is first of all an image of ourselves. Transforming the image of the enemy means primarily understanding and transforming this image. The struggle against the enemy is first of all a struggle against the fearful imaginations of ourselves.

What is important at this point are three things. First: where does fear come from? Second: how does it find and create its objects? Third: what role does religion play in transforming this object into a religious enemy?

As observers note, religion is seldom the initiator of violent conflict. But once religion is involved, the conflict becomes tougher and harder to solve. This can be understood as follows: if religion produces the parameters in which a violent conflict can be understood, this conflict is simplified within religious or theological terminology, which makes the 'other' as 'the enemy' less complex and easier to combat. Doing so, the real causes of violent conflict remain invisible behind religious dualities and the other comes to the surface as simply 'the enemy'.

This volume is the result of a conference organized by ICCO- Global Ministries in cooperation with the Protestant Theological University in The Netherlands and the World Council of Churches in October 2009. The general aim of the conference was to accompany people in conflict areas and to search for instruments that might help to understand what goes on. Three workshops preceded the conference. The workshops were dealing with question on religion and violence related to countries like Nigeria and Pakistan. Surrounding the conference, two seminars were organized at the Protestant Theological University and at Utrecht University. People who played an important role during all these preparations included Nasr Abu Zayd, Chales Amjad-Ali and Shanta Premawardhana. We discovered that the main question that was constantly haunting our discussions about religion and violence was in fact about what religion and violence do with human relationships. During the conference we wanted to bring academic reflections 'back' to what they reflect upon: human relations at grassroots level, the one shooting the other because he thinks that the other thinks that he is the bad guy, the harsh and difficult situations in which religious prejudices, but also religious doctrine and hermeneutics, bring our traumatized and injured communities. This was, we considered, the big challenge of this conference. It contained a necessary step: to transform intellectual activity into useful programmes and tools at grassroots level. This volume testifies about how we dealt with this challenge.

The focus of this volume will be strongly on perspectives on otherness and on how these perspectives are shaped. This means that, in order to understand the religious influence on this construction, a exploration of the concept of enmity in holy texts is evident, especially because these texts shape hermeneutically and symbolically current contexts in which 'the other' is shaped. Klaas Spronk's focus is on difficult texts from the Old Testament that deal with violence. He argues that ...

Muhammad Farooq Khan will do the same with Quranic texts. Farooq Khan not only delivered this text as a lecture during the seminar but also shared a lot of practice with us about the transformation of young Taliban warriors into 'real faithful Muslims', for which he consequently used his authority as an Islamic scholar and the al-Quran as a base. In October 2010 he was murdered by an assassination squad.

In an effort to understand the construction of enmity not only at a cultural-religious but also at a social-psychological level, Lucien van Liere's focus is on social processes that have an impact on the perception of otherness and the other. Is there a possibility to search for a common ground in, say, grief? Does grief connect people in such a way that constructions of the other as enemy can be put aside?

One of the questions that came to the fore during the thinking process surrounding the seminar and the publication of this volume was how to translate insights on the religious impact on constructions of enmity into practices of transformation. Lieke Werkman describes some tools how this can be done at grassroots level. How these tools can work is shown by Aart Verburg. His powerful report on the transformation of images of war into images of care by ministers from the Rwandese church shows how art can work as a tool to distract feelings of anger and pain. Having tools to analyse religion-related violent conflicts raises the question of contextuality. Three articles will deal with this question and

contextualize our efforts to understand interhuman relationships and the religious construction and deconstruction of the enemy in the situations of Pakistan, Indonesia and The Netherlands and Bosnia.

Emmanuel Assi shows how important it is that theological themes shift once people contextualize their thinking about 'the other'. In his article he gives tools to think about ones religious tradition and to use this tradition as a liberating, transforming force.

Between 1999 and 2002 violent clashes broke out on Ambon, Indonesia, between Christians and Muslims. During the so-called Moluccan War, not only Christians and Muslims clashed, but also old concepts of communal peace and current perspectives on 'the religious other'. Jozef Hehanussa describes what happened on the Moluccas and how new perspectives and emotions threatened old cultural treaties. Not only during violent conflicts but also in post-conflict situations it is difficult to take up responsibility for what happened. Both sides claim their rights and their victimhood. The enemy is always 'the other'. Sometimes however, despite the political or religious inability or disinclination, people still suffering painful memories, perpetrators and victims meet. Dion van den Berg is a peace activist and organized meetings between Srebrenica-survivors and Dutchbat soldiers. In 1995 about 9.000 Muslim men and boys were killed in Srebrenica, Bosnia, by the Bosnian-Serbian army. Van den Berg reports not only on the difficult but also encouraging meetings, but also on the Dutch political framing of the conflict.

During the project, it became more and more clear that transforming the image of the enemy does not simply mean that we should develop a perspective on the other in which the other is perceived as a simply good human being. That cannot be the case. Transforming the image of the enemy first of all means transforming the simplicity of the other into a new complexity. It means that we try to perceive the other as good and as bad, as frustrated and traumatized but also as capable of compassion and love as we are or as I am. Thus the most important step seems to be the most difficult step: withdraw from simplistic categorizations and acknowledge the complex context in which the other tries to live up to his own ideas of being a human. This volume testifies not only about the difficulties but also about the possibilities of such a way to think.