

## The fundamental importance of education for interreligious and interconvictional dialogue

3<sup>rd</sup> Webinar of the Committee for the interreligious & interconvictional Dialogue Conference of INGOs, Council of Europe

Monday, March 27, 2023 17 hrs. via zoom

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### Welcome by the moderator, Dr. Thea Mohr

Good evening to all of you and welcome to our 3rd webinar of the Committee for Interreligious and Interconfessional Dialogue at the Council of Europe.

Today we want to focus on the fundamental importance of education for inter-religious and inter-confessional dialogue and we are very happy about your participation, thank you very much for your interest.

We have been able to win very renowned representatives of Judaism, Islam and Buddhism as speakers for this evening. I will introduce each of them to you shortly before their lecture. We will begin immediately with introductory words from the chairs of the committee, Gabriela Frey and Sören Lenz.

Before that, we would like to thank our two simultaneous translators, Mrs Elizabeta Greneron and Sanja Furnadjiska-Adams, who will enable you to listen to the lectures in English and French

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respectively. If you need a translation, you can click on the "Languages" link at the bottom of the page and listen to the presentation in your chosen language.

As with the last webinars, we will again publish today's session on our website so that you have the opportunity to read the contributions in detail again or to forward them to friendly organisations and interested parties.

One last organisational note. As we are somewhat limited in time, but would also like to give you the opportunity to ask questions directly to the speakers, we kindly ask you to write your question to the speakers in the chat, this can be done already during the presentation. We will then pass the questions on to the speakers after the talk, so we hope you can all be considered. Thank you very much for that.

Now I would like to hand over to the Co-Chair of the Committee, Ms Gabriela Frey, representing the European Buddhist Union and then to the Co-Chair Sören Lenz, representing the Communion of Protestant churches in Europe/Conference of the Churches on the Rhine, Europe

### **Why we chose the subject: "The fundamental importance of education for interreligious and interconvictional dialogue"**

#### **Sören Lenz**

#### **Religions - potential for conflict in the history of Europe**

Europe has been marked by wars of a different kind for many centuries. Many bloody conflicts of the last centuries have a religious background. And we know there are still looming conflicts like a sword of Damocles linked to religion, e.g. in Northern Ireland or the Balkans. Religion and nationalism often enter unholy coalitions and instrumentalise, mainly where spiritual institutions base themselves on pronounced nationalism. The search for one's identity plays a significant role: nation, culture, and religion are so interwoven and can quickly become a warped argument for exclusive identities. The potential for conflict is considerable.

#### **Religions and their potential for dialogue**

On the other hand, religions emphasise solidarity and call for peace. They do not only teach freedom but also contribute to overcoming violence, constructive, non-violent conflict management, or in interrupting violence. Their representatives have always shown in history that they also contain tremendous potential for dialogue, reconciliation, and peace. Great spiritual personalities such as Martin Luther King, Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama, Mother Theresa have shown a great willingness to reconcile and bring understanding to society in the past and the present. They are initiators of dialogue, mediation and function for many as role models. Grassroot believers are often involved in an exchange on a local or regional level. These dialogues fulfil two functions: Firstly, they enable a better understanding between the religious communities themselves; secondly, they directly impact the political reality of society at the local and national levels. In other words when religious communities publicly engage in dialogue and mutual understanding, it positively affects community. Religions and faith communities play a role in the public sphere and are therefore responsible for the common good, just as state authorities are responsible for facilitating and promoting these dialogues. In this respect, religious and belief communities have a role to play, as the liberal democratic state depends on the cohesive forces of civil society organisations.

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## **The Vision of the IRICD Committee**

On the European Buddhist Union and the Conference of European Churches initiative, both participatory members of the Council of Europe, the Inter-religious and Interconvictional Dialogue Committee was established last year at the INGO Conference. Drawing on the recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly of REC 2080 (2015) of the CoE2, we wish to contribute to establish a necessary permanent dialogue platform through this committee – which brings together several faith-based NGOs. Such dialogue is essential at the spiritual leadership level and perhaps to an even greater extent at the level of civil society. The principle of unity in diversity, which we see as a strength and reconciling force, also applies to this committee. We aim to expand interreligious dialogue, not to cling to the status quo, but to encourage change, e.g., in gender issues, social justice, ecology, for more peaceful coexistence, etc. It is about defining a new “we” that does not exclude and condemn others but learns to value and appreciate others – a mutual learning process and further development without denying one's roots of belonging.

**Gabriela Frey:**

### **Education as a task of inter-religious and interconvictional dialogue**

We look at education in the sense of the German word “Bildung”, which includes professional training and fact-based learning and culture, knowledge, and personality development, up to and including critical discernment and a sense of social responsibility. In this sense, education is not limited to school but is a lifelong activity. Education in the sense of knowledge and the perception of how others think and feel. Education is holistic and concerns the whole human individual. Empathy, respect and self-reflection are essential aspects of this education. In this sense, education is foremost about learning self-critical analysis of one's positions in relation with others who think and feel differently. For this reason, we consider education to be an essential element of dialogue, especially inter-religious and interconvictional dialogue.

### **Concrete projects of the committee**

The distinction between formal and non-formal education is important because the latter goes beyond school education in terms of age, structure, and scope but is an essential aspect in shaping a democratic society. The importance of such a broad understanding of education is even more evident as the increase in freely accessible digital offerings in recent years has shaped our culture today in terms of information overload and critical debate to an unimagined extent. Many religious and ideological communities must resort to informal education, as they are often not represented in formal school education programmes. However, religious education – where it is part of the state curriculum – is often not taken seriously and takes second place in the priority of subjects.

Therefore, in our current project, we are focusing on informal education programmes offered by religious and faith communities and organisations that meet them at eye level in dialogue and the sense of mutual learning from one another. They all have in common that they not only promote dialogue but deliberately offer tools and strategies against hatred, racism, and discrimination. It is interesting to see how they respond to new phenomena in digital media. In our opinion, there is a great need for exchange and mutual learning in Europe. While there are pretty comprehensive studies on formal education we lack a really good insight into the informal sector, which often lacks quality assessment. Therefore, we will concentrate on finding good-practice examples, especially on the grassroots level, to help others create programmes and projects. We will organise seminars and webinars to help interested parties on this path.

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## Diversity and Inclusiveness

In Europe, Abrahamic religions played an important role in creating identity and preserving traditions. The European Buddhist Union has offered this dialogue committee to bring new aspects into European debates. Buddhism is partly based on other philosophical foundations. At least in Europe, Buddhist communities are not involved in the construction of classical cultural and national identity. Buddhism can therefore offer new perspectives without the usual historical burden. Our committee is not limited to religious belief systems, it is open to other worldview communities and to dialogue with Western secular and religious philosophies. This dialogue will therefore include humanists and non-believers of all kinds.

**Today's webinar** will focus on the fundamental importance and role of education for interreligious and interconvictional dialogue in the many forms of dialogue groups that exist in cities and communities to date. Despite all the considerable efforts, one cannot help but notice that the expanded and tolerant communication skills that are being aimed at do not necessarily lead to an improved and balanced understanding of the Other.

What aspects of education and training must we focus on in order to achieve a more understanding, tolerant, balanced and respectful coexistence of the religions and worldviews involved? They are all based on behaviour, core attitudes and values. Values are usually not purely abstract concepts, but are closely related to emotions, which are both extensive and very complex. Recognising and understanding them in others is facilitated by education - but not alone.

Our webinar will explore how effective education and training are in helping people understand each other's values and attitudes. We also need to explore the feelings associated with these values and attitudes.

It is crucial to find and highlight new ways to empower existing religious and interconvictional dialogue groups to focus their attention on the importance and role of education - formal and informal - and making it more inclusive and inspiring.

### Rabbi Pauline Bebe

*...has been leading the Liberal Jewish Community of Ile de France in the 11th arrondissement since its creation in 1995. In 1990, she was ordained in London, the first woman to become a rabbi in France and continental Europe after the war. She is a member of the board of the European Liberal Rabbis Association (ERA) and a member of the founding college of the interfaith and secular programme Emouna at Sciences Po. She is the director of the Rabbinical School of Paris (ERP) which she founded in 2020. Author of numerous books and articles, she speaks out on many social issues, defending openness, dialogue and humanity.*

The fundamental role of education in religious and interfaith dialogue-27 March 2023

I am very honoured to have been invited to participate in this seminar. First of all, we could define interreligious and interfaith dialogue, or rather its prerequisites. I see three necessities, true and sincere listening - without thinking about the answer while the other is speaking, the recognition that we do not hold the truth - in religious matters who can claim this? and the capacity to put ourselves in the place of the other in order to understand him or her from his or her point of view, i.e. to change perspective.

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I would like to focus my remarks on two fundamental points about education:

- I. the transmission of values ensures their continuity**
- II. education is achieved through training, example and action**

**I.** It seems obvious to say that the tools of dialogue, if not passed on to the next generation, become dead letters. It is not a matter of a group of right-thinking people politely exchanging what they believe and what they think and jealously guarding this experience, which is certainly enriching, but if these experiences of dialogue are not shared, they are doomed to fail and disappear. In all our traditions we have examples of exchanges between civilisations, cultures, languages and philosophies. None of our traditions grew up in a vacuum and theories of purity, of non-mixity are dangerous and biologically impossible. Life is exchange. Take the example of Jethro in the Torah, priest of Midian, who taught Moses the principle of delegation by which Moses was later able to govern the people. It is a wisdom that could be described as coming from outside one tradition that has softened another. These examples need to be told and passed on to the next generation. There is a plethora of them in all cultures. The Talmud or oral tradition portrays each generation as standing on the shoulders of the previous one, benefiting from its wisdom and seeing further ahead.

**II.** The education of the youngest is not done through great philosophical speeches; it is done at school but also at home through training, example and action. If I see my parents inviting people of different beliefs and religions into my home, I learn about diversity from an early age. I learn that some people take off their shoes when they come in, that others have different eating habits than me, that my clothes can express who I am.

This learning of diversity must be practiced from a very young age. I remember the testimony in Emuna of a rabbi who invited Jewish and Muslim women to prepare a couscous together and to peel the vegetables. There was laughter and friendships were made. Differences, without being denied, were sublimated by the recognition of a common humanity.

A midrash, a rabbinic story, tells us that God took from the earth all colours and all corners of the world to form the first human being. It affirms universal dignity and diversity.

Active pedagogy is essential, which is why we encourage group projects at Emouna. We are confronted with the reality of difference, the relationship to time of each religion, of each culture, the relationship to words - we do not say the same things in all languages, the relationship to the other, to society. Like Proust's madeleine, it is the sensation that we remember, it is the sensation that triggers memory and recollection, it is the association of body and soul that allows us to change in order to practice dialogue and action.

Thus in a secular and republican society, education for dialogue is fundamental. Education not for "living together" but for "doing together". Like musicians in a symphony, we must tune our instruments to play together, a score that recognises each one in its tonality and forms a harmonious whole.

**Dr. Eytan Silberstein:**

**Co- Founder of LOGOI**, l'Institut pour le développement du dialogue interconvictionnel. **In 2022, after the EMOUNA training ([www.emouna.be](http://www.emouna.be))**, he had the honour to participate in the foundation of the LOGOI Institute which challenges itself to the development of dialogue in respect, in listening - also by addressing the "stumbling blocks" that exist between religious and/or philosophical convictions.

*Trained in classical guitar, dance, ballet he graduated in Vienna with a doctorate in generative grammar, and was a university assistant in linguistics. Since October 2022 he teaches religious studies at the Open University in London, Official at the European Commission since 1996, he is also a member of the liberal synagogue Beth Hillel, Brussels*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Logoi Institute, thank you for hosting this webinar.

During the academic year 2020-2021, I had the pleasure of participating in a training cycle entitled EMOUNA ("faith" in Hebrew). This training is given to ministers of religion, leaders of faith communities and people involved in them. EMOUNA aims to (and I quote from the training webpage): "provide participants with a space for reflection, information and the acquisition of skills in different themes of common interest during 15 days of training, half of which take place at the Catholic University of Leuven and half in different places emblematic of spirituality and civic commitment. Along the way, this programme also helps to strengthen links and mutual knowledge and to promote inter-religious dialogue. End of quote.

Since then, the Dutch version of the EMOUNA Belgium training has been opened up to humanists. Inter-religious dialogue is becoming inter-faith.

This dialogue is precisely what we are interested in here! And more particularly the training and teaching that lead to it.

The term "dialogue" (often used nowadays in connection with the word "trialogue") is sometimes perceived as a conversation with two voices: δία can be understood as referring to the number 2, δύο in ancient Greek.

But this is not the exact meaning of the word. Literally, dialogue is 'something' that happens, not 'to two' (δύο), but 'through' (δία). Through!

As for λόγος, it is a versatile term. "Word", "speech", "reason", "relation", but also, "reasoning", "definition", or "argumentation". In Plato, the Logos is considered as the 'reason of the world', as containing in itself the eternal ideas, archetypes of all things. In Heraclitus of Ephesus, the ideas of measure, proportion, harmony and rhythm are grouped around the Logos.

In this spirit, we decided to name our Institute Logoi, plural of λόγος. Very precisely, and in its full name, it is the "Institute for the Development of Interfaith Dialogue: Logoi".

The Institute is the result of a citizen's initiative, born from the will of a handful of people passionate about the active promotion of interconvictional dialogue, both in Belgium and in Europe.

The Logoi Institute is undoubtedly the most natural heir to the intellectual heritage of the Belgian interfaith group "Orval", of which Monsignor Jean-Louis Cornez was one of the mainstays long before

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he became the current president of the Logoi Institute. It should be noted in passing that the "Orval group" takes its name from the Belgian Cistercian abbey next to which the first meetings were held, and not from the beer of the same name.

Our institute is also anchored in the EMOUNA training, in the sense that a majority of the members of the Institute have followed or are currently following it.

The Logoi Institute has rapidly developed a very active collaboration with the members of the Groupe Interconvictionnel, Interculturel et International, the G3i, a very active French think tank with which Logoi is working on the preparation of the Interconvictionality Fair which should take place in 2025 in Brussels and Strasbourg.

In January 2022, the Logoi Institute registered its statutes as a non-profit association (ASBL being a legal form of association in Belgium). The ASBL positions itself as a group of reflection, influence and meta-connection, aspiring to connect people, initiatives and ideas that develop and support interfaith dialogue.

The Logoi Institute is part of a vision of interfaith dialogue that has two main characteristics. These distinguish it from other forms of dialogue.

First of all, the Logoi Institute supports authentic dialogue, known as the dialogue of Truth, in which each person commits personally, on the basis of his or her convictional, religious and/or philosophical identity, to enter into dialogue with other identities, without necessarily passing through a community identity, be it convictional or cultural. We do not ignore the identity of individuals, on the contrary, but we work with their own multiple identities, without however avoiding the "stumbling blocks". These are tackled with courage, but also with open-mindedness, kindness and mutual respect.

In addition to respect for otherness, this commitment requires an empathetic and humble attitude, a hermeneutic openness to research, a willingness to study diversities and interpersonal understanding, not to mention linguistic hospitality.

Within this framework, it goes without saying that any form of proselytising is forbidden.

The second essential characteristic of the dialogue as we see it at Logoi is that it is open to all religious and/or philosophical convictions present in Belgian and European society. This dialogue is therefore not confined to the classic inter-religious dialogue between official religious institutions, a classic dialogue which obviously retains its usefulness and importance.

Interfaith dialogue seems to us to imply also intra-faith dialogue.

It is also important to emphasise that interfaith dialogue does not seek conclusive debates at all costs. Rather, the aim of interfaith dialogue would be to create a space for dialogue where each convictional identity can express itself in a sincere and frank manner and enter into an open and respectful discussion with the other.

Of course, concrete operational solutions or proposals for "building together in peace" may result from this. These solutions or proposals could relate to the strengthening of deliberative and participatory democracy, the consolidation of the European Ideal around spirituality, the fight against all forms of obscurantism and radicalism, shared values and the global challenges of humanity.

It should be noted that we have expressly chosen the expression "building together in peace", which we feel is more action-oriented than the traditional expression "living together in peace".

Moreover, the Logoi Institute itself perfectly reflects the interfaith dialogue described above, as it is made up of members of different convictions. We have Catholics, Protestants of various denominations, Buddhists, Jews, Freemasons, agnostics, atheists, etc. All of them are willing to engage in a dialogue with each other. All of them are willing to commit themselves personally to this beautiful journey, considering that the adventure experienced is ultimately at least as important as the destination.

Some projects, certainly ambitious, have already seen the light of day, such as the Interconvictional Media and the Interconvictionality Fair which I have already mentioned. The common objective is to bring together actors and associations involved in interconvictional dialogue and developing skills around the promotion of the European Charter of Interconvictionality.

Finally, the Logoi Institute wishes to participate actively in the training and development of competences in the field of interconvictional dialogue, particularly in institutions where Interconvictionality deserves to be known.

To this end, we have a project called "Reli-Jeu", which is currently being conceptualised but not yet implemented, and about which I would like to talk to you for a moment.

Ludus, ludi, in Latin, means both school and play. Our project Reli-Jeu ("Religion" and "Play") intends to take advantage of the attraction of playfulness to raise awareness of dialogue.

Oswald Wirth, a Freemason of the early 20th century with a strong esoteric bent, wrote: "He who believes he has the Truth does not think of seeking it".

ReliJeu would thus allow the players to deepen their knowledge of the culture and beliefs of others, but also of their own culture.

As a graduation project during an Emouna training course, we had initially imagined ReliJeu as a Trivial Pursuit. But we quickly realised that this kind of game already existed on the market. We then rethought the Reli-Jeu by asking the following questions:

- How to make players think about their own beliefs?
- How can we get players to learn about and appreciate the cultures of others?

We thought of doing this by proposing "threads", in other words, "story threads" around which the reflections could crystallise. These threads could be presented on cards (like in Trivial Pursuit) or in some other form.

Let me give you some ideas for these "threads".

- Question: You may have heard of Noah's Ark. In your memory, how many animals of each species did God tell Noah to bring on the Ark?

I'll give you a few moments to think about this.

- If you have an answer in mind, it probably comes directly or indirectly from a verse in the book of Genesis in the Bible (Genesis 6:19, in the translation of the French Rabbinate): "And of every living creature, of every kind, you shall gather two into the ark to keep with you: a male and a female.

So, two animals to allow the perpetuation of the species. I now propose to read the following verse (Genesis 8:20):

- "And Noah set up an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean beast and of every clean bird, and offered them for a burnt offering on the altar.

This should surprise you: how can there still be clean animals today, if Noah offered them as burnt offerings on the altar?

Here's why: there are two stories of the Flood intertwined in the book of Genesis. The second story line, in fact, states the following (Genesis 7:2):

- "Of every pure quadruped you shall take seven pairs, the male and his female; and of the non-pure quadrupeds two, the male and his female".

You will have noticed that these two stories are contradictory and follow each other: the one with only two animals per species in chapter 6 of Genesis; the one with four pure animals and two unclean animals in chapter 7.

Biblical scholars have, in fact, been able to detect two plots called "Yahwist" and "Elohist" after the name used for God in the Hebrew text.

We see, therefore, that in the Bible, and consequently in the Jewish and Christian traditions, two traditions, two stories coexist around the character of Noah.

But what about the figure of Noah in Islam?

Noah (نوح Nūfi, in Arabic) is mentioned 43 times in the Quran. Sura 71 is dedicated to him (it is named after him).

is dedicated to him (it is also named after him). There are some very important differences from the biblical account. In Sura 71, in contrast to the biblical account, it is Noah who asks for the extermination of humanity and not God who decides it, and some of Noah's family members perish.

Participants could also be presented with the Gilgamesh myth to show them a reference to the extra-biblical and extra-Coranic Flood. Or even in Greek mythology, Deucalion, son of Prometheus, who is warned of a coming flood by Zeus and Poseidon.

Another idea would be to focus on societal themes or traditions specific to cultures: marriage, birth, the integration of a member into the community (circumcision, baptism, various initiation rites), death and burial, etc. The American ethnologist Henry Glassie, professor emeritus at Indiana University Bloomington, has rightly written that 'tradition is the creation of the future from elements of the past'. The game would not only aim to discover the different approaches, practices and traditions of yesterday, today and everywhere. It should also allow players to step back from their own horizons and consciously participate in their future.

In order to make Reli-Jeu a reality we obviously need manpower and specialists. In the first instance, the game could be offered to EMOUNA students as a kind of test bed.

Before concluding, I would like to share with you an anecdote which demonstrates, <sup>2</sup> as if it were still necessary to demonstrate, that games can be an excellent vector of convictional culture and, by the same token, of interconvictional culture.

In 2015, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, the toy company Playmobil created a ten centimetre high plastic figure of Martin Luther holding a German translation

of the Bible and a writing quill, presumably to emphasise the importance of the word to the father of the Reformation. Well, this children's toy was the fastest selling product of all time (Capon, 2015).

My conclusion will be brief: it lies in a motto. This motto is the motto of the Belgian Service d'Assistance Religieuse et Morale de la Défense (SARM). It could be the motto of the entire interfaith dialogue. The motto in Latin is the following: E LUCIBUS PLURIBUS, UNUM. Which SARM has translated into French:

"Many lights, together". Many lights, together!

I thank you for listening and if you have any questions, I am at your disposal.

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- Site internet du groupe G3i : G3i – Home

#### Prof. Dr. Amir Dziri

*...born 1984 in Tunis and raised in Germany; 2004-2010 Bachelor and Master degree in Islamic Studies at the University of Bonn; 2011-2012 Research Assistant at the University of Erfurt in Islamic Studies, 2011-2017 at the Centre for Islamic Theology at the University of Münster; 2015 PhD at the University of Münster; 2017 appointment to the professorship in Islamic Studies at the University of Freiburg i.Ü.; 2020 Master in Higher Education and Science Management at WWU Weiterbildung GmbH; Research on religious thought and the intellectual and cultural history of Islam in the horizon of questions relevant to the present; the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (SCIS) is a multilingual competence center on questions at the interface of Islam and society and offers Islamic-academic reflection as part of its interdisciplinary approach; in the spirit of engaged scholarship, the SCIS is dedicated to conceiving transfer formats in addition to the areas of research and teaching and is responsible for numerous training program*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to share some thoughts with you and for our exchange. I am very much looking forward to it.

**Introductory thoughts:** I have to admit that the preparation of this speech was not easy. The questions formulated in this webinar, initiated by the Committee for Interreligious and Interfaith Dialogue (CDIRIC), are vast and complex.

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In general, it seems to me that two main observations can be put forward. On the one hand, a starting point remains: education must enable people to reflect on themselves, to have a differentiated perception of the world, to lead a self-determined life. Education therefore contributes to prosperity, social balance and peace. On the other hand, there is a growing erosion of social consensus, particularly in the area of the more or less strong questioning of democratic and liberal values or at least of certain aspects of a just and peaceful coexistence. Given this tension between the importance of education on the one hand and the erosion of social consensus on the other, I have to ask myself what potential and what resources education can offer to counteract the forces that are pushing for the breakdown of social cohesion. What contribution can education make to interreligious and plural cohabitation? What about educational opportunities for Muslims?

And then there is the question of religion. The question is therefore to what extent religious convictions have a catalytic effect on the processes of social breakdown or how they can act as positive forces for successful cohabitation. The experience of the Christian churches in their positive role in stabilising society after the Second World War has shown that religion can play a constructive role.

With the so-called "Islam issue", the debate about the fragmentation of society tends to intensify as certain lines of conflict intersect. At the same time, many people fear the emotional attachment and mobilisation power of religion, especially if it is an exclusive interpretation based on Islam. However, the 'Islam issue' has become a symbol for much wider issues, involving other religious or social groups, than its own subject matter. For example, what is the general place of religion in a largely secular society?

I would like to start from two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that the governance of Islam in Europe depends to a large extent on educational integration. The second hypothesis starts from a more general dimension and concerns the profound changes, even upheavals, that have taken place in educational institutions. I formulate this from an observation of distress in our faculties of humanities and theology. I therefore ask the following question: what contributions can the humanities and social sciences still make today to the individual and social development of man?

#### **First hypothesis: the formation of Islam through educational policy**

The governance of Islam in Europe has become an urgent issue (El-Zayat 2021, 18-22; Godard 2015a; Maussen 2007, 4-6). Of course, it should be stressed that national contexts differ greatly in terms of their history and links to the Muslim world, but also in terms of their respective integration regimes or the cultural and socio-economic composition of Muslim migration representatives. At the same time, all countries face the same challenge: the successful integration of Muslims into their respective contexts (Bruce 2019).

In the context of concretely addressing the issue of Muslim inclusion in society, policy is experimenting with different organisational strategies, which I would like to typologise and briefly discuss here:

A first, policy-based strategy is to produce inclusion in local labour markets through targeted efforts. The assumption is that socio-economic integration is the best guarantee of social cohesion. Religious affiliation therefore takes a back seat. The prospect of a life of relative prosperity should remove the breeding ground for a frustrating orientation towards religion. The disadvantage is that in a negative economic climate, the promise of prosperity is lost. In this case, there is a fear of an economic struggle for the distribution of wealth; in a positive economic situation, economic integration does take place, but it is not necessarily accompanied by a conviction in the values of living together.

Diplomatic governance tends to address Muslim integration by working on diplomatic relations with Muslim states. This has the advantage of delegating responsibility for issues of religious orientation to the authorities of Muslim states. The disadvantage certainly lies, on the one hand, in the degree of the object of exchange used for diplomatic negotiation and, on the other hand, in the lack of identification of Muslims with their new social contexts in Europe (Godard 2015b).

Another strategy in the field of religious policy is to establish political representation, as implemented in the past by the French Council of the Muslim Faith, today by the Forum de l'Islam de France or the German Conference on Islam. This approach responds to the reproach of political exclusion often made by Muslims, and also opens up the prospect of a certain reliability and strength of commitment of the agreements reached. On the other hand, it has been found that such an instrument leads to a strong politicisation of Muslim communities, that the democratic legitimacy of such a format is difficult to justify, and that a major challenge is to integrate the different interests of Muslim organisations and associations (Zeghal 2005).

Another strategy is to promote the governance of Islam through legal integration. Examples of this are the amendment of the Austrian Islam Act of 2015 or the consideration of the recognition of Muslim religious communities as organisations under public law in the German Länder. This strategy has enabled Muslim communities to exercise certain organisational rights, for example with regard to the teaching of the Islamic religion. The disadvantages of this approach are the risk of political instrumentalization, either by the Muslim religious communities themselves or by partisan political positions. In addition, there is the question of how to deal with the great confessional diversity of Muslim communities.

A final governance strategy is to promote offers of religious reflection in the context of academic studies. Such access has been achieved through the creation of corresponding offers, for example in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands or the Scandinavian countries. The advantage of this is that it links religious reflection to its social context in Europe. The integration into universities also offers opportunities for contact with other theologies and the humanities. The disadvantages of this approach are, for example, that the line between the private and public organisation of religious education provision becomes blurred (Benzine et al. 2017; Messner 2018). Furthermore, there is a risk of drift between the production of Muslim academic knowledge and the provision of knowledge produced in Muslim communities. The beginnings of this can already be seen, for example, in the difficult translation of an 'Islam of the Enlightenment' into Franco-Muslim communities, or in the occasional hardening between university Islamic theology and Muslim communities in Germany and Austria.

The strategies presented therefore all have certain advantages and disadvantages. The transitions are smooth and often a mixture of different strategies is practiced.

If, however, it were to be a question of favouring one of these strategies, I would highlight education policy, as in my opinion it fulfils the following overriding conditions

1. it is communicative, i.e. it allows the exchange of opinions and beliefs. It offers the possibility of expressing one's own convictions intersubjectively and in exchange with other convictions and worldviews;
2. it opens up the space for critical reflection and discussion by not being compartmentalised by private law;

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3. It corresponds to the formation of Muslim religious authority, which is largely through the transmission of knowledge (Zeghal 2004, 12-15).

The structural strengthening of Islamology, the creation of a training institute within the framework of Forif or the numerous low-threshold continuing education programmes in France (White Paper 2014), or the training of Muslim theologians and professors of religion in the centres of Islamic theology at various universities in Germany or Austria are decisive steps in this direction (Lange 2014).

### **Second assumption: Current changes in the field of education**

Although the adjustment of education policy to the realities of Muslim life in European societies is to be welcomed, the education system itself is currently undergoing major changes.

Amongst these changes, there is a huge loss of importance of educational institutions such as schools, universities or media companies. These long-dominant educational institutions have lost their organisational sovereignty and are being challenged by new actors. This development can be understood on the one hand as a democratisation of knowledge production. On the other hand, it erodes the quality assurance of training and professional standards in the education profession.

But not only have other educational actors emerged, the way of teaching has also changed. Visual, auditory and communicative interaction play a much more important role than writing and reading in the perception of the world and the formation of judgement. The habituation to the operational logic of commercialised technology has massively changed the way knowledge is produced. Moreover, the organisation of the education system according to economic units of measurement such as output and outcome has introduced a tendency towards quantification. The resulting determination of educational success on the basis of competences certainly corresponds to central educational ideals.

However, the disciplines of the humanities and social sciences have great difficulty in making the educational ideals they support, such as critical thinking and the ability to judge or analytical, creative and conceptual thinking, measurable with a view to professional goals and ultimately economic valuation. Anything that is not geared towards a concrete profession is of no value in educational policy - this could be said as a shortcut.

### **Experiences from practice**

In conclusion, I want to talk about experiences from my institutional environment - although examples from other academic or civil society actors in other national contexts could certainly be mobilised. However, I will limit myself here to the experience of our Institute.

From February 2015 to February 2016, the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (CSIS) conducted an inventory and needs analysis of Islam-related continuing education in Switzerland (Schmid et al. 2016). This initiative was motivated by domestic and foreign political events that raised the question of the quality of integration of Muslims in Switzerland. In addition to interviews with authorities, institutions and individual experts, the focus was on the exchange with multipliers, associations and Muslim organisations, in order to integrate their expertise into the inventory and needs analysis.

The results showed that most of the continuing education offers at that time were aimed at a general public and that there were no specific offers for the continuing education of Muslims. On the other hand, it appeared that there were no spaces where different perspectives and concerns could be addressed together in a constructive discussion (Schmid et al. 2016, 96-107).

Based on these findings, concrete continuing education offers were developed in the following years in two areas: 1. continuing education offers for professionals in contact with Muslims; 2. continuing education offers for a specifically Muslim target audience.

With regard to continuing education for professionals in contact with Muslims, different formats (CAS with 15 ECTS, continuing education workshops with a certificate of participation or certificate) were organised on different topics, including "Religion at work. A topic for employees and employers", "Radicalisation in relation to Islam. Ruptures, environments, networks and ideologies" or "Religious education, headscarves, forced marriage in Switzerland".

With regard to the provision of continuing education for a specifically Muslim target group, the Muslims surveyed in the needs analysis expressed a desire to address the following topics:

- Associations as social actors - Missions, communication and media
- Young Muslims - Youth work, school and participation
- Gender and body - Roles, sexuality and health
- Chaplaincy in hospitals and prisons - organisational forms, concepts and conflicts
- Prevention - radicalisation - countermeasures and empowerment

In order to meet these needs, a specific programme was set up under the name OMAS: "Muslim Organisations as Social Actors", which was carried out in three editions between 2016 and 2023. During this period, we were able to organise 59 workshops with a total of one thousand participants, of which 593 were men and 407 were women; among the participants were also 215 Imams. The OMAS programme has also given rise to spin-offs that address specific themes. In order to professionalise imams and Muslim leaders, we are currently organising a further training course entitled "Zurich Competence" in collaboration with the Canton of Zurich and the Association of Islamic Organisations in Zurich. In the field of Muslim chaplaincy, we have set up CAS courses in German and French, the participants of which are mainly active in the field of hospital and emergency chaplaincy, but also in the fields of prison, army and asylum chaplaincy.

From these practical experiences, I would like to conclude by highlighting the following points:

- Access through education is and remains one of the main instruments for designing interreligious and plural cohabitation. The important question, however, is how this education is organised and designed.
- Top-down initiatives by politicians or universities seem overall to have little chance of sustainable success. Many people at different levels of schools, associations, organisations and religious communities are already involved and constitute an important resource that should be exploited.
- A distinction between the "public, objective and scientific study of religion" and the "private, theological and normative study of religion" is too rigid and does not allow for the creation of intermediate spaces in which qualified actors can act as interlocutors at important interfaces of civil society involvement.
- In addition to personal commitment, structural support is needed for integrative projects. Further training in the field of religious education should be at least partially financed and administrative barriers to admission should be reduced.

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- Bridge-builders in public institutions, authorities, educational institutions, associations, churches and religious communities are important players. Reliable and serious partnerships are needed. However, many individuals and groups continue to be involved and there is a need to strengthen them.
- In the area of specifically Muslim and religious education, there is a lack of more comprehensive provision. Where there are offers covered by universities, exchange and transfer services are often missing. Where there are private providers, e.g. in private training institutes, associations or mosques, quality standards and critical exchange are missing.

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## Gabrielle Rosner-Bloch

*...was born in Strasbourg into a Jewish family attached to traditions and concerned to transmit them, while being perfectly integrated into society. With an Ashkenazi father from Alsace-Lorraine, and a Sephardic mother who arrived from Morocco in the 1960s, she grew up in a multicultural environment, open to the Other, while being French and deeply attached to Republican values.*

*This articulation between her particular identity, the fact of being part of a minority and her place in French society, has undoubtedly made her sensitive to the absolute necessity of knowing the Other, but also of knowing oneself, in order to be able to "make society" and live together. Her professional commitments – she is a journalist and has worked in literary events -, her associative commitments, in particular for the recognition of progressive and egalitarian movements within Judaism, as well as a constant interest in the place of religion in society, have led her to be elected in charge of "Cults", and therefore of Interreligious Dialogue.*

### The intercultural rally:

The intercultural rally is one of the flagship operations of a scheme run by the Grand Est Region for high school students and apprentices throughout its territory, called "the Month of the Other".

The "Month of the Other" aims to raise awareness among the Region's high school students and apprentices of respect for the Other in his or her differences, be they social, cultural, ethnic, gender-related or disability-related.

This operation aims to develop proposals for actions on themes that enable young people to learn to recognise each other in order to live together better. The intercultural rally is one of these actions.

What is the principle? The intercultural rally offers high school students the opportunity to visit three or four places of worship in the course of a day: a synagogue, a mosque, a Catholic and/or Protestant church. As a general rule, the pupils are prepared for these visits by their teachers, generally through religion, history-geography or moral and civic education classes. It is on this occasion that they address the principle of secularism in which this school outing is embedded, which is - and this is important to emphasise - of a cultural and not a religious nature.

Because, starting from the fact that ignorance is a vector of prejudice, racism and anti-Semitism, the aim here is

### - Demystifying places of worship by showing that they are not only

- Places of collective prayer for each religion
- Places of life, vectors of a very rich community life
- But also places open to the Other and places of peace
  
- To become more knowledgeable about the religions presented
- To be able to understand the common points that exist between religions
- To highlight the notions of benevolence, respect and living together well

### Each visit is guided by a volunteer delegated by the place of worship. In general, the tour covers:

- The historical aspect of the building, its construction and the context of its construction.
- The particularities of the religion it represents through, for example, the Book to which it

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refers, the festivals, the objects present in the place of worship, etc.

- The role of the guide is also to highlight the inter-religious dialogue that exists in the area, the notions of respect and the ability to live with the Other even if his or her religion is different or if he or she does not claim any religion.

The guide also has the task of leaving plenty of room for questions from the pupils.

To date, the intercultural rally is offered in Strasbourg and Mulhouse. For more than 10 years, the intercultural rally in Strasbourg has offered to visit the Great Synagogue of Peace, the Great Mosque of Strasbourg and the church of Saint-Pierre le Vieux, which has the specificity of being next to a Protestant church, the latter no longer receiving worship. Thousands of pupils have therefore been able to take part in these visits, at a rate of more than thirty rallies per year.

Since the beginning of the school year in 2022, the Grand Est Region and the city of Mulhouse have launched the rally in Mulhouse, a city where more than 136 nationalities live side by side and where 42% of its inhabitants are under 30 years old. We estimate that more than 700 young people were able to visit this year.

The Grand Est Region receives many requests for visits from a large number of teachers: many of them feel that the field of religion is sometimes difficult to tackle in class and stress that they are not always very comfortable with this subject. But above all, they want to find a tool - among others - to cut short a great deal of ignorance on the part of young people and the resulting positions that can encourage questionable or even dangerous behaviour for society. There is therefore a strong desire to offer something other than what is found in books and on social networks and to act by confronting pupils with reality.

Teachers often testify to the astonishment that pupils express when they understand the links between religions, both from a theological point of view and from the point of view of dialogue between their representatives. Muslim pupils in particular often take pride in showing their "place of worship", which is presented, along with other places, as part of the city. During a rally, I was told of a very enthusiastic discussion on charity between Muslim and Catholic pupils in the same class: they were surprised to discover that this value had a prominent place in each of their religions!

However, it is important, first of all, to underline that this rally is particularly favoured by the Alsatian terrain, i.e. by the Concordat which governs the relations between the State and the religions and which is specific, for historical reasons, to Alsace and Moselle. In a very short way, I would say that the principle of secularism is lived there in a more open way and that religions have a more civic presence in the heart of the city.

Secondly, this rally is not unanimously supported by all teachers because some of them believe that it simply does not belong in the school context.

It is also important to underline the very strong commitment, I would even say extraordinary, of the places of worship in the organisation of this rally. Thousands of hours of voluntary work are offered to these young people. Deconstructing stereotypes without rejecting them seems essential to them. And the places of worship have understood this.

Finally, it should also be remembered that the field of religion is very broad, and art, history and geography often find their place in the discourse of guides and teachers.

Finally, the Region will be working on new developments and proposals in the coming months to further enrich the tour. But I cannot tell you more at the moment because we are still thinking about it.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is a short but I hope precise presentation of the intercultural rally promoted by the Grand Est Region.

I am of course at your disposal if you have any questions!

#### **David Rycroft**

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*David trains mindfulness instructors and school teachers in cultivating mindfulness, awareness, empathy and compassion, and in sharing these skills with teenagers. Researchers at Montpellier university recently concluded that students who had completed Mind With Heart's programmes became more respectful and less violent, and less inclined to indoctrination and radicalisation. To date, the charity has reached 9,000 teenagers, and trained 800 teachers in 60 schools in 9 countries.*

*Educated at Eton College and Edinburgh University, David taught art in a London secondary school for ten years before moving to France to set up Rigpe Yeshe, a Buddhist parents' association organising summer programmes for children and teenagers. He subsequently co-founded Mind With Heart in 2012. David has an MA in Buddhist studies. He is also a practising fine-artist. Very briefly he will also talk about his new pilot project: Teach Peace.*

Good evening everyone.

Thank you for inviting me to present the work of education charity Mind With Heart. We've all heard of Gandhi. To millions of us, he is a famous advocate of non-violence. The key here is that he did not just advocate non-violence in his words; he walked the talk, summing up his philosophy in the phrase “my life is my message”.

He did of course also write. This is one thing he has to say about education, here writing about an ‘education of the heart’:

*One word only as to the education of the heart. I do not believe that this can be imparted through books. It can only be done through the living touch of the teacher. And, who are the teachers in the primary and even secondary schools? Are they men and women of faith and character? Have they themselves received the training of the heart?*

What does he mean by a training of the heart? This ‘real education’, as he calls it, is to see all others as ‘members of one human family’. It’s ‘realizing the essential brotherhood of man’.

Now that all sounds lovely but how do we actually train the heart? And how do we embody this so that we can feel fully aligned with our values, and make our life, more and more, our message? The short answer is through sustained familiarity, as the great 8th century Buddhist scholar and saint Shantideva said:

*There is nothing whatsoever that remains difficult as one gets used to it.*

With this in mind, rather than talking *about* Mind With Heart, I’d like to invite you all to join with me

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actually *doing* a guided exercise of educating the heart. It's one of the exercises that Mind With Heart uses in its program for teenagers called 'Connected With Others'. I realize that you are not teenagers, and you are not in session 7 of Connected with Others, so you might feel you are suddenly 'thrown in' to something unfamiliar, but let's try...It's part of this training in realization of the essential brotherhood of man - or these days we keep it gender- neutral, the equality of all - finding common ground between ourselves and others. The exercise is called 'Just like Me'. And I'll guide you through it.

Firstly just checking that you are sitting comfortably with the back straight, body still and at ease ...

... and just breathing naturally...

And with eyes open, looking at the Zoom screen in front of you and choosing one person on whom to place your gaze ... Once your attention is settled on this person - I invite you to consider the following phrases:

- Just like me, this person sitting in front of their Zoom screen has a body that probably spends hours sitting in front of a computer, a body that sometimes aches, and gets tired at the end of a long day...
- Just like me, this person can speak; they can communicate. Just like me, this person has a voice; Just like me, they have something to say.
- Just like me, this person can see, hear and feel. Just like me this person has thoughts and emotions. Just like me, this person has a mind. Just like me, this person has memories of the past - both pleasant and painful - and just like me, this person has plans for the future. Just like me, this person wishes to contribute something to the world.
- Now considering how all the people on this webinar, are they not all 'just like me' in their wish to be happy, and to be free from suffering...?

And in the future, maybe sitting opposite someone on public transport, or in a shopping queue, or just before a meeting starts, we can recall this exercise and consider that the person in front of us is, indeed, 'just like me'.

Now - all of this was by way of an introduction.

I have been asked to give you some context around education charity Mind With Heart. It's mission, as you can see from the [mindwithheart.org](http://mindwithheart.org) website is to train teachers and students in sustainable wellbeing, emotional health and social connection.

I taught art in a secondary school in London for 10 years. In this time I saw how the school, the curriculum and the education system was indeed very good. Very good at bringing students to a level of literacy and numeracy and configuring young minds in a particular worldview - a worldview that values hard work and good grades which in turn lead to places at good universities and eventually well-paid jobs. Yet even in many faith schools, there is an implicit belief system rooted in scientific materialism and consumerism. The three principal measures of success in this system are wealth, power and prestige.

Now while this worldview has its merits and I am not here to criticize, I would say that this is a rather narrow and short-sighted vision of success.

As a teacher, I saw on a daily basis that the education we were delivering to the youth of today was

incomplete. Of course, within the constraints of the system, each teacher could bring some of their personality and values. For example, one of my favourite projects was to introduce an investigation of emotions through the language of abstract art. In another project, students explored their relationships with others by creating mind-maps of colorful dots and symbols based loosely on Tibetan mandala art and Australian Aboriginal painting.

But still, it felt that there were important areas of human experience left untouched by the curriculum.

I remember one time, during a form period where the 18 year olds were completing their university application form. Everyone had finished early and we still had about 15 minutes until the bell for lunch. Not wanting to let the students out early, I decided to share some points from the Buddhist teachings that I had been studying. I talked about the preciousness of human life, the inevitability of impermanence and death, the infallibility of the principle of cause and effect, and the all-pervasiveness of suffering as a part of life. Initially hesitant to share such content, I saw immediately that the students were more and more interested by the depth of what they were hearing.

The bell rang for lunch, but no-one rushed out; they all wanted to hear more. When I did, in the end, stop speaking, they broke out into a spontaneous and enthusiastic round of applause. This spontaneous sign of appreciation showed me that there is a need for education to share more than mere subject knowledge. The education system needs to be sharing experiences of peace, experiences of human understanding.

Not long after this, I moved with my French wife and daughters to France where I co-founded an international Buddhist parents' association. We set up a summer program for children and teenagers whose parents were on retreat. It was so successful in creating the container for these children and teenagers to cultivate some mental stability and emotional intelligence, to form deep friendships, and to sharpen their curiosity into philosophical truths that, after about 10 years, some of us educators envisaged an entirely secular version that could be delivered in schools. And this is what became the education charity Mind With Heart, now based in central London.

Teachers often ask me what I think a spiritual perspective can bring to present-day education. I reply that one main purpose of education is to set us up for life. And one main purpose of life is to be happy. And if we look closely, we can see that there are two types of happiness - one more materialistic [the Ancient Greeks called it *hedonism*] and the other more coming from within the mind [the Ancient Greeks called it *eudaemonia*]. Currently, our education system is implicitly dominated by hedonism, and its belief that we can generate human happiness through the manipulation of - and the consumption of - the outside world. Advocates of *eudaemonia*, sometimes translated as 'genuine human flourishing', suggest that it is only if we also train the mind, and cultivate inner qualities of peace, compassion and wisdom, that we will generate and sustain happiness.

The vision of Mind With Heart, and my personal wish, is that all students have the opportunity to receive an education in *eudaemonia*.

You may well be asking yourself what that would look like in the current education climate. And this is where I believe the great religions of the world can contribute to today's predominantly secular education, where schools are seeing alarming levels of anxiety, depression, restlessness and violence.

The great religions of the world can offer tried-and-tested 'tools' to alleviate these toxic states of mind that sabotage peace. Back in the 1990s, a UNESCO commission under the leadership of Jacques Delors proposed four pillars of education: learning how to know, how to do, to live together and to be. Continuing to use these pillars as a framework, and looking at the future of education, UNESCO now

interprets these with an emphasis on collectivity and common humanity. So the four pillars have now become: Learning to study, inquire and co-construct together; Learning to collectively mobilize; Learning to live in a common world; Learning to attend and care. Educators like ourselves who also have a spiritual practice can offer a toolbox that will all students of all ages to discuss, clarify and experience issues around peace, ethics and human understanding.

And all of these start - as Nobel Peace laureate Scilla Ellworthy recently told a large gathering of young people - with learning how to self-reflect, to work with our own minds and become more emotionally intelligent. One story Mind With Heart uses to stimulate discussion around emotional intelligence, and how we relate to our own thoughts is this one that Mind With Heart uses in its Connected With Myself course; it's called The Two Monks.

The River and the Top Model.

Again, in the spirit of actually doing (not just talking about) what Mind With Heart does in its Connected With Myself course, I invite you to listen to this story.

Once upon a time there were two monks, a master and his disciple. They had been on retreat and were now travelling back to their monastery. Still about three hours walk away from their destination, they came to the river. There had been a flood and the old bridge had been washed away. As the river was wide but not deep, they decided to wade across. Just at that moment a beautiful young woman dressed in the finest and most fashionable silk arrived.

"What am I going to do?" She exclaimed with some distress. "I need to get to town quickly but mustn't spoil my clothes."

Without a moment's hesitation, the elder monk graciously picked her up, held her close to him, and carried her across the muddy river, placing her onto the dry ground on the far shore. They parted company – the beautiful young woman heading off to town and the monks back to their monastery. The monks continued on their way. But there was an uneasy silence. The young monk was showing signs of inner turmoil.

Just before arriving at the monastery, the younger monk could restrain himself no longer: "Surely it is against the rules, against all our precepts what you did back there" He burst out. "We all know that a monk is not allowed to touch a woman... How could you have done that? And to have such close contact with her! This is a violation of our vows. And she was so beautiful. It's just...unthinkable" He went on and on with his outburst.

The elder monk listened patiently to the accusations. Finally, during a pause, he said, "My friend, I set that girl down back at the crossing a long time ago. Are you still carrying her?"

The Connected with Myself and Connected with Others courses both contain a variety of stories, scientific research, creative exercises, and debates and well as guided mindfulness and empathy exercises. This range of different tools is designed to meet different learning styles and needs and to engage a full diversity of teenage minds. The aim is to ignite their curiosity, deepen their understanding, and bring everyone experientially into an education of the heart.

But having a great course is not enough. The most important resource that any school has is its teachers.

Mind With Heart's approach is first and foremost to train the teachers. When teachers are familiar with the principles and exercises themselves, then they embody them, and students learn through the teacher's living example.

The challenge is that schools have multiple pulls on their resources, and time is at a premium. In addition, teachers are exhausted and don't want yet more new initiatives to accommodate. Getting schools to priorities peace is a whole journey in itself.

**This is why the European Buddhist Union has recently created Teach Peace;**

Teach Peace is an initiative to support teachers in their journey bringing tools for sustainable peace and social cohesion to their schools. But this is perhaps a story for another time.

**Teach Peace information:**

- <https://europeanbuddhistunion.org/teach-peace>
- <https://www.teach-peace.org/>

We thank all participants for their interest and attention to our webinars. Please do not hesitate to contact us for any questions or suggestions.

