

Johannes Lähnemann

Interreligious and Peace Education in Times of Crisis

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A History of Religions for Peace



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Miguel Angel Moratinos, UN High Commissioner of the Alliance of Civilizations, addresses delegates in front of the Ring for Peace at the 10th World Assembly of Religions for Peace, 2019.

“All faith traditions are interconnected, complementary and support the same values, which can be considered universal values and which unite one humanity, many cultures and many religions.”

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Preface

The World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) movement has existed since 1970, since the 1990s under the name *Religions for Peace (RfP)*. It is the world's largest and most representative coalition of religions on peace issues. What has this movement been able to contribute to interreligious understanding and peace-building in more than 50 years? Fundamental is the conviction that people, despite the diversity of their religious traditions, are united in the search for peace. In the beginning, the focus was on concrete conflicts, especially the Cold War and the nuclear threat. Soon, however, the spectrum was broadened: How can we succeed in arriving at a positive concept of peace that involves more than the absence of war? How are peace and justice connected? How are peace and the preservation of the foundations of life interdependent? What can religions contribute to respect for human rights? What values should guide cooperation? And what role do learning, upbringing and education play in this? Only if young people have respect for their fellow human beings and feel responsibility for everything that lives and exists, if they are sensitive to hatred, violence and developments that are hostile to life and the community, will they be equipped to live together in a way that opens up a future for our planet.

Accordingly, the task of interreligious education and peace education has become increasingly important for the work of *Religions for Peace*: at the World Assemblies of Religions for Peace, in individual projects in many countries such as the Nuremberg Forums on Cultural Encounters and especially through the Peace Education Standing Commission, of which I was Chairman. Since the 1990s, this commission has documented inter-religious peace education projects and encouraged exchange between them. Since the RfP World Assembly in Lindau in 2019, it has been continued by the Standing Commission Interreligious Education.

The impetus for this publication was an online lecture I gave for the Oxford Interfaith Forum on the invitation of its Director, Dr. Thea Gomelauri, in January 2023 - entitled "No Peace among Nations and Religions without Interreligious Learning and Peace Education". It had a wide international and interfaith audience. The book that grew out of it is intended to make the history of interreligious learning and peace education at *Religions for Peace* visible and provide impetus for future work in this field. It is the second publication of the Standing Commission on Interreligious Learning. The first publication "Faithful Peace. Why the journey to resilience is multi-religious" was published in 2022 and met with a broad response. In it, the members of the Commission developed their religious and spiritual motivations for their interreligious engagement.

I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Norbert Klaes (Würzburg) and Dr. Günther Gebhardt (Tübingen), who are among the pioneers of interreligious peace work, for their

portrayal of the first decades of WCRP. This work is then closely linked to the Chair of Religious Education and Didactics of Protestant Religious Education at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, which I held from 1981-2007. Dr. Werner Haußmann supported the work there from the very beginning. My successor in the chair, Prof. Dr. Manfred Pirner, has continued the Nuremberg Forums on Cultural Encounter with me since 2010 and strengthened their international appeal.

I am especially grateful to Prof. Dr. Azza Karam, UN Advisor on Religion and Development and former Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*, as well as to Deepika Singh as Deputy General Secretary of *RfP* and Dr. Karen Hernandez as Program Director and Executive Director of the Standing Commission Interreligious Education, for encouraging me to write this book.

Dr. Reinhard Krauss, Executive Director of the Academy for Jewish, Christian and Islamic Studies (Los Angeles), has been particularly committed to this project, supervised the development of the manuscript and proofread it together with Dr. Vanessa R. de Obaldía (Cambridge) and Mr. Timothy Powell (Oxford). My daughter Prof. Henrike Lähnemann (Oxford) offered advice on the work at all stages and prepared both the pre-print for the presentation in Oxford on 10 February 2024 and the final publication. Rainer Kuhl from the EB-Verlag Dr. Brandt agreed to include the book in the series *Pädagogische Beiträge zur Kulturbegegnung* as volume 35, making it accessible to a broad international readership.

My sincere thanks go to all of them!

Goslar, June 2024
Johannes Lähnemann