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**BIBLE AND QURAN TEXT ANALYSIS  
FROM THE ASPECT OF WOMEN'S INITIATIVES**

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### **Abstract**

The teachings of monotheistic religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity build an important foundation from which social values and norms of behaviour are derived. In this paper I analyse the messages of monotheistic religions, written down in the holy books of the Bible (the Old and New Testaments) and the Quran, to reveal the foundations upon which peace initiatives are built. Based on a keyword search of terms related to peace-building conducted on 2005 pages of sacred texts, I isolated segments that focus on trust, reconciliation, and peace and performed a qualitative analysis of their content. In the process, I paid special attention to women's contributions to peace. In addition to sacred writings, the conducted content analysis also involved five Orthodox and Islamic religious textbooks, used in religious education in primary and secondary schools. In practical terms, the paper focuses on recognising messages that motivate peace-building behaviour or, on the other hand, provoke conflict within monotheism, which is present in the Balkans in Christian religious communities of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant denomination, as well as in Islam and Judaism.

**Keywords:** *Bible, Quran, peace, reconciliation, trust, woman.*

## **Texts of the monotheistic holy books empowering women to initiate reconciliation and social change**

### **Introduction**

The turning point of the 1990s left a deep mark on the lives of people in the Balkans. An ideology of promised social development, fraternity, unity and common rituals, fell apart along with the country which plummeted into a disastrous war, leaving deep and long-lasting consequences in all parts of the affected territory. The Western world's long feared bogeyman of Communism, a system built on the foundation stone of atheism as a scientific view of the world, collapsed like a house of cards, bringing far-reaching changes in all aspects of life, including religion – which I address in this paper.

Religious communities regained power and influence in places where for more than half a century they had been marginalised. The resulting transformation of identities was twofold, i.e. motivated partly by private internal needs and partly by external pressures. The starting point of this research is the question of religious messages that can inspire practical action and social engagement of women, believers of different monotheistic religions.

My work so far has been focused on the process of reconciliation and on the role of religion in peace-building, which I addressed in particular within the research project *Reconciliation and Trust Building in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, conducted in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh (Wilkes et al., 2013; Kuburić and Brkić 2016). The mentioned research examined the general population's attitudes on the issues of reconciliation and opportunities of coexistence, based on both the experience of war and the experience of being a refugee, as well as the majority-minority status within their communities, the boundaries of which have largely been determined by religious and national identities. The process of reconciliation is based on trust, which is influenced by a wide range of factors, from personal experience to PR and media activities. According to the latest Balkan Monitor survey (Kuburić and Kuburić 2010), religion plays a significant role among other relevant institutions which influence the daily lives of people.

My analysis of the Bible's content with regard to remembering and forgetting (Kuburić 2016a) was based on a keyword search of the terms/phrases: *remember/remembrance, do not forget, forget* and *memory/memorial*. Taking this research as a basis in understanding the central messages of the Bible and the values upon which the understanding of other relevant

messages may rely, I shall highlight the message to remember the "day of Israel's deliverance from bondage" as a "memorial day", a day of freedom, indicating that freedom is seen as the greatest of values. The second message refers to the "day of vengeance", the day of the enemy's destruction, in which God's vengeance is emphasised, i.e. the notion that God rather than man shall be the one to blot out the memory of the enemy. In seeking to understand the multifaceted meaning of the word *freedom*, I conducted an analysis of the Bible's content (Kuburić 2017a) on the basis of the 104 verses in which the word 'freedom' is mentioned, attempting to answer the question: Is freedom of opinion possible when it comes to religious teachings?

The Decalogue as the central place of the Bible (2 Moses 20: 1-17) represents a concrete expression of religious values. The hierarchical power structure cultivated by monotheism is a structure that honours God as the Giver of Life, because life is the highest value. The vertical component of the hierarchy is demonstrated by the Fifth Commandment, which calls for children to honour their father and mother, those who have passed life onto them. The Sixth Commandment also protects life as the highest value by forbidding violence. Monotheism finds a solution in the theology of salvation, protecting life not only by restrictive measures but also by lifelong actions aimed at overcoming mortality in the concept of resurrection. The Seventh Commandment points to the importance of love as a religious value within the dyad of marriage. All religious values are in a way summed up (i.e. integrated) in the overarching concept and the triple commandment of "love", calling us to love God, our neighbours and ourselves (Matthew 22: 37-39). An Old Testament reminder reads: *"So you will remember and do all my commandments and be holy to your God."* (4 Moses 15:40). According to the Theology of Integrity (Kuburić 2016b), integrity is based on outcomes that are pervading, focused on development and continual growth and that encompass the wholeness of a being that approaches the notion of "holiness". A New Testament reminder takes place in the foot washing ceremony, which is associated with the forgiveness of sins and preparation for the Lord's Supper. In this context, theology is read in action: *"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."* (John 13:17).

In this paper, I continue to search for messages of the holy books upon which the practice of peacebuilding is founded, a practice in which values such as life, love and freedom can be preserved. Through an analysis of Bible and Quran texts, I explore the issue of peace and reconciliation based on the theoretical approach of reflection on possible interpretations. The questions I address in the paper concern the empowerment of women for active

participation in both religious and social life based on messages that can be read from the sacred writings. The questions that inspire me most are:

- How can one contribute to peace and nonviolence in the circumstances of modern life?
- Does history repeat itself?
- Can several millennia old patterns even be understood or applied in modern conditions?

### **Religious culture and its power**

In his book *Teorije kulture (Theories of Culture)*, which draws on his previous books such as *Znati i verovati (Knowing and Believing)* (1995), *Dijalog i tolerancija (Dialogue and Tolerance)* (1997), *Religija 1. i 2. (Religion I and II)* (1998), Đuro Šušnjić (2015) takes the view that it is not only good that different cultures exist, but that there are also different ways of life according to these cultures. In this way people can be free and can choose how to think and live. The theory of cultural dialogue enables the confrontation of individual cognitive and "value" points of view in order to reach a common cognitive and value core based on which the coexistence of all individual cultures is made possible. Truth, goodness, justice, beauty, and holiness of life are values that are never diminished by being shared among cultures. Different social and cultural groups may be integrated into society and the state while maintaining their ethnic and cultural identities.

What is the contribution of the world's religions to the culture of everyday life? Can the idea of universal human rights and freedoms be supported by the great religions of the world? Šušnjić believes that only those religions that are founded on universal values and norms are in line with universal human rights and freedoms (natural, civil, and personal ones). It is through these common values that people become aware they are brothers and sisters in the great family of humanity. Monotheistic religions pass on this heritage through the very idea of a Single God, God the Creator who has placed the grounds of existence on a set of abstract values that are given concrete expression in sacred writings. These values and norms exist to be lived by.

However, problems do exist, problems of social conflicts that use religion not as a factor of integration, but as an instrument of social disintegration. Is this an abuse of religion

or its essence? Ivo Cvitković, in his book *Moj susjed musliman (My Muslim Neighbour)* (2011), believes that it constitutes a betrayal of religion. The most commonly occurring words in his book are *tolerance* (appearing on 60 pages) and *dialogue* (on 55 pages) as a cry for peace. On the other hand, the word *violence* appears on 38 pages of the book and its frequency of occurrence draws attention to the dark side of everyday life. Every practice seems to be a betrayal of theory (Kuburić, 2009).

Has religion been and will it be a cause for peace or a cause of conflict? Is written heritage that is kept and passed on from generation to generation sufficient to convey values and norms and are these even applicable in the contemporary setting? This question of current relevance of old writings, as well as their modern interpretation, shall be examined on actual examples from Orthodox and Islamic religious textbooks.

### **Research methodology**

Since the meaning that believers attribute to the Bible and the Quran is not the same, i.e. the basic difference in their theological understanding lies in the fact that Muslims consider the Quran to be the word of God, whereas for the Christians Jesus Christ himself is the word of God, in this paper I make no attempt to compare the two books. Just as a reminder, even within the same religion, Christianity for example, the Bible is not always given the same weight or assigned the same meaning. Therefore, rather than comparing primary and secondary school textbooks of religious education, I examine them individually and look for messages related to the subject of my study.

The research data was processed by analysing the content of written texts with the help of the MAXQDA statistical program. The basic set of documents analysed includes: *The Holy Scripture or the Old and New Testament of the Bible*, a new contemporary translation prepared by the Institute for Hebrew Language (2010) and the Quran, translation by Besim Korkut, Sarajevo, 1977. For the purpose of comparison of individual texts, I used the print version of the Bible translated by Đuro Daničić and Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, as well as the Noble Quran (1978), translated by Hafiz Muhammad Pandža and Džemaluddin Čaušević. Among religious education textbooks I analysed the content of the Orthodox catechism for the first grade of primary school (Nikolić, Darko 2017) and the sixth grade of primary school (Nikolić, Sanja 2017). I also conducted a textbook analysis of the Orthodox catechism for the third grade of secondary school (Midić 2005). Out of Islamic religious textbooks, I examined

a textbook for the first grade of primary school (Begović 2008) and a textbook for the third grade of secondary school (Isanović, Begović, Jusić 2012) used in Bosnia and Herzegovina. No textbook for Jewish religious education is available in Serbia, since – when it comes to elective courses – Jewish children choose citizenship education, although they are entitled by law to attend religious education in state schools. Quotations from the Bible and from Orthodox textbooks were transliterated from the Cyrillic script to the Latin script but remained in the original Serbian dialect of "ekavica".

The total number of pages searched, from which segments have been isolated in which the listed key words appear, is 2005. The selected Bible translation has 865 pages, or 845 without appendices. The Quran has 609 pages. The total number of pages of analysed religious education textbooks is 531, out of which 260 are from Orthodox textbooks and 271 from Islamic ones. By analysing the messages of monotheistic religions written down in holy books, I reveal the foundations on which peace initiatives can be based. The initial hypothesis of my study is that the messages of the sacred writings are aimed at peace-building and that significant women figures in sacred stories are the bearers of peace messages.

The starting point of my content analysis was a keyword search of the full texts of the Bible (both the Old and the New Testaments) and the Quran by the following key words: *peace*, *reconciliation* and *trust*. In this way, segments were isolated, which in general represented peace messages or passages describing events in which examples of a peace initiative could be recognised, regardless of their final outcome. Accordingly, the basic units of analysis are texts with descriptions of events containing the word *peace* or any of its derivatives, as well as peace messages containing the same words.

The categorisation of segments in the chosen translations of the holy books was based on different criteria. I observed peace in the context of everyday speech, for example in greetings. I also focused on peace in the context of its duration. The causes of disturbance were another category into which I classified all those segments that were characterised by some kind of disturbance, such as God's revelations, internal states of people, social situations, or improper relations with fellowmen. I chose segments that emphasised the role of women in the process of reconciliation based on the criterion of containing both the word *woman* and the word *peace*. Such segments were thus classified by gender, based on women figures appearing as mediators of reconciliation. I highlighted famous examples of women whose contribution to peace was explicitly indicated by use of the words *peace* or *reconciliation* in the selected segment. A number of biblical verses referred to peace which

depends on God. I classified such segments into the category of external locus of control, which indicates that there is no way to achieve peace other than by believing in God's protection and God's power and by relying on the peace-giving God. The next category involved segments referring to an internal locus of control, i.e. attitudes and actions through which man initiates peace. In my analysis I focused primarily on the internal locus of control, exploring attitudes and actions presented in the sacred books as contributing to peace. The meaning of peace answers the question of its purpose, why peace is needed - for example, because it contributes to greater rationality and better resolution of problems. I conclude by addressing the question of what the values are, that make peace important, i.e. which values are actually promoted by peace.

## **Research results**

### ***Overall Sample***

Based on the search of the word *peace*, its grammatical variants and derivatives formed from *peace* as the root word (such as the words *peaceable*, *peaceably*, *peaceful*, *peacefully*), 327 segments were isolated in the Bible and 26 segments in the Quran.<sup>1</sup> The greater number of text segments that use the word *peace* in the Bible is partly related to the greater number of pages of the *Bible* as compared to the *Quran*. Based on my next keyword search, which involved the word *trust* (Serbian: *poverenje*) and its grammatical variants, five segments of text were isolated in the Bible (2 thereof in the Old Testament and 3 in the New Testament), whereas the analysed translation of the Quran contained 2 such segments (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of segments containing the words *peace* and *trust*

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<sup>1</sup> *Translator's Note* - the presented results actually refer to the Serbian word for peace (*mir*) and its variants/derivatives (such as *pomirenje*, *izmirenje*, *primirje*) found in the above listed Serbian translations of the Bible and the Quran. The English derivatives of the word *peace* are given just as an illustration and do not represent actual translations of derivatives of the Serbian word *mir* used in the original text (*pomirenje*, for example, means *reconciliation*), nor do the presented results correspond to the occurrence of the word *peace* and its variants/derivatives in English versions of the sacred writings. The same applies to all other search results presented below.

Code System	Biblija	Kuran	Bible / Quran
+	327	26	Peace
+	5	2	Trust

Figure 1 shows the categories into which I classified the total of 353 isolated text segments addressing peace in the Quran and the Bible. The thematic classification of segments containing the word *peace* showed that almost half (48%) referred to human contribution to peace, which reveals the essential aspects of peace governed by human behaviour. Peace appears in these texts in the context of purpose, of the well-being that peace brings, in the context of cognitive understanding of peace as a value and of emotional control and rational behaviour through which peace is achieved.

The causes of man's disturbance are depicted in 24% of the texts. The texts reveal disturbance that comes from different sources, which I divided into sources of God's revelations, prophet sermons, religious intolerance, false testimony, betrayal, violence, injustice, distress over imposters and deceivers having peace, amassing of unjust gain, guilt over sin, disturbing dreams.

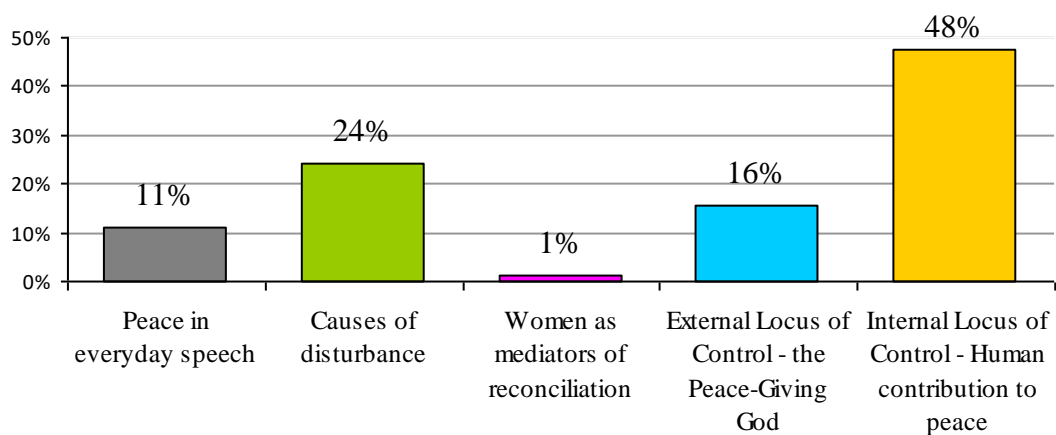
Another category included texts in which peace is associated with God's power, in which it is left to God to bring peace, and in which faith is bestowed upon God for protection. These are classified under the category of external locus of control. Peace is given to and taken away from people from the outside. The category includes 16% of the isolated texts referring to situations in which God fights, in which God brings peace and creates trouble, while man goes to bed in peace and sleeps under God's protection; God gives peace and overcomes evil; through the mediation of Christ believers have peace in the world of distress, liberated from guilt and reconciled with God through Christ's death; the God of peace resurrects Christ and grants goodness to people.

Peace in everyday speech is used in 11% of texts. Here peace is used in greeting, peace and blessings are multiplied, the question is repeated if a person comes peaceably, examining the intentions people are encountered with in everyday communication. A common departing benediction instructed a person to go in peace, to go with peace. There is an impression that peace was constantly present in interpersonal communication, peace both as an internal and an external value. The duration of peace is often associated with the character of the ruling political power and the attributes of its rulers, meaning that peace was

usually owed to rulers who were wise, obedient, and faithful to the laws by which they preserved peace. Sometimes peace lasted for 40 years, sometimes 80. One of the explanations from a textbook for Islamic religious education was that man often does not appreciate peace until losing it. True believers affirm the values such as peace, love, tolerance, and responsibility in their daily lives.

In conclusion, *Figure 1* demonstrates 1% of the isolated segments where peace is directly associated with the word *woman*. Viewing them from the perspective of women's initiatives, I analysed such segments in the wider context of the passages describing the entire event, and not only looking at the sentences which contained the reference to peace. Some of them were in positions of power, some achieved peace through their wisdom and others by force. Within this range of possibilities peace-building strategies were identified that had been employed both by women remembered by name and surname as well as by those referred to as a "wise woman" or just "a (certain) woman".

*Figure 1.* Categorisation of holy book segments containing the word *peace* or its derivatives



## TRUST

The individual sense of trust is established during the first year of a child's life and is reflected in a positive attitude towards oneself and others, in good sleep and in the absence of anxiety (Erikson 1963). Trust is based on a feeling that there are people one can depend on

and that this world is a safe place to live in. Trust in others and self-esteem are the most important prerequisites of mental health, so the establishment of trust is one of the primary tasks. Trust represents the basis of all interpersonal relationships. Marriage, for example, would be unthinkable without trust. In addition to being central in this emotional dyad, from which the family is formed and on which social reproduction is based, a relationship of trust is an important factor of integration within every other social group as well. Trust is also crucial in religion; it is directed primarily towards God.

Thus, if it is possible to view the development of an individual in parallel with the development of society, trust is the one factor without which no community can be built, from marital to national. The turbulent history of the Balkans has built layers of mistrust towards the other, especially towards conquerors. At the same time, in our everyday lives we encounter warmth and cordiality reflected in people's hospitality, kindness and openness towards others. Between the two extremes of total trust and total mistrust there lies a vast array of real life experiences that have influenced the opinions, attitudes and behaviour of the people of this area.

### **Trust in the *Bible***

In the analysis of the Holy Scripture based on the keyword search of the term *trust*, we find the message that God is the one who is trustworthy, that a man is trustworthy if God shows him mercy and if he accepts this responsibility. However, trust is a process that is built and broken in the dynamics of everyday life. Trust built on lies brings no benefit to man. In terms of the New Testament discourse untrustworthy, above all, are those who exhibit violence against the values of life, truth, justice and loyalty. Trust in itself is good if it is built on universal values. I will quote two verses that speak of a trustworthy man, without stating what kind of a man he actually is – he is deemed so by God's judgement alone: "but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy." (1 Corinthians 7:25); "I thank him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful by appointing me to his service." (1 Timothy 1:12) The Lord's name is celebrated as a trustworthy name: "and thy name will be established and magnified forever, saying, 'The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, is Israel's God,'" (1 Chronicles 17:24)

Trust is further addressed in the context of deceptive words which the Lord sees through: "Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit

adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are delivered!' – only to go on doing all these abominations?" (Jeremiah 7: 8-10)

The *New Testament* offers a text saying that trust or distrust may be caused by knowing the person one trusts or distrusts, by knowing "what was in man" (John 2:24-25). As a link to understanding the reliability and trustworthiness of man as a being, the following text is found in the *Old Testament*: "cursed is the man who trusts in man (...), whose heart turns away from the Lord" (Jeremiah 17:5).

### **Trust in the *Quran***

The following quotation highlights the significance of mutual trust and the importance of maintaining it: "O ye who believe! Betray not Allah and His messenger, nor knowingly betray your trusts." (Surah 8:27) A text of the *Quran* speaking about debt and lending says: "If ye be on a journey and cannot find a scribe, then a pledge in hand (shall suffice). And if one of you entrusteth to another let him who is trusted deliver up that which is entrusted to him (according to the pact between them) and let him observe his duty to Allah his Lord." (Surah 2:283) When speaking about witnesses, the *Quran* notes that a male witness may be substituted by two women: "And call to witness, from among your men, two witnesses. And if two men be not (at hand) then a man and two women, of such as ye approve as witnesses, so that if one of the two erreth (through forgetfulness) the one of them will remind." (Surah 2:282)

### **RECONCILIATION**

As we live in a world of contradictions, the word *reconciliation* refers to something that precedes peace, so I searched for texts that elaborate on the need for reconciliation and the messages which the Bible gives in this regard. What makes this world a place of disturbance is the presence of evil. One of the key theological issues of monotheistic religions lies in man's misgivings over the suffering of the innocent, given that God is presented as the absolute good (Kuburić 2007).

In order for a person to be able to accept reality as it is, it is necessary to accept the existence of both good and evil in the world and to create one's life in relation to reality. The

basis of mental health lies in accepting one's own freedom as both a right and a responsibility (Kuburić 2017a).

The value of freedom of choice seems to be above God's power, and thus man is attributed a power which exceeds that of God. On the other hand, man carries a responsibility beyond his own power. It is in this context that Christianity comes forth in the spirit of the *New Testament* as the Church revealing the message of Christ's mediation for the salvation of the world. By searching the Bible for grammatical variants of the word *reconciliation*<sup>2</sup> I find texts that call primarily to reconciliation with God.

Based on a search of the word *reconciliation* and its grammatical variants and derivatives (in Serbian *pomirenje/izmirenje/primirje* meaning *reconciliation/truce*) 17 segments were isolated in the Bible (2 thereof in the *Old Testament* and 15 in the *New Testament*), whereas the analysed translation of the Quran contained 7 segments. I treated these segments as a subset of the set of segments isolated by the search of the word *peace*, since the Serbian word *pomirenje* (meaning *reconciliation*) represents a derivative of the word *mir* (meaning *peace*). Therefore, under the topic of reconciliation, I will also address messages and events that do not use words *reconciliation/truce* (Serbian *pomirenje/izmirenje/primirje*), but through various forms containing the word *peace* (e.g. "you do not want to make peace") speak about periods of disturbance and ways of dealing with them, rather than about periods of peace.

Table 2. Number of segments containing the words *pomirenje/izmirenje/primirje* (meaning *reconciliation/truce*)

Code System	Biblija	Kuran
Pomirenje/izmirenje/primirje	17	7

The Bible / The Quran

### Reconciliation in the *Bible*

The purpose of existence of religious communities is the reconciliation of man to God, which is reflected in the fact that 53% (9 out of 17) segments containing the Serbian

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<sup>2</sup> Translator's Note: Serbian *pomirenje*, a derivative of the Serbian word *mir* (meaning "peace")

words *pomirenje/izmirenje/primirje* (meaning *reconciliation/truce*) dealt with reconciliation of man to God and with mediation in the reconciliation of others to God. The initiative was from God, who through Christ reconciled the world to himself, and the apostles were sent as ambassadors for Christ to beseech people to be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:18-19,20). "Agree with God, and be at peace; thereby good will come to you." (Job 22:21)

Reconciliation that precedes the conversion to God is reconciliation with "your brother": "Leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Matthew 5:24). Jesus continues by advising the disciples: "Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison." (Matthew 5: 25-26)

When it comes to the relationship between man and woman, reconciliation is more desirable than separation: "*(but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband)*" (1 Corinthians 7:11).

### **Reconciliation in the *Quran***

The messages of the Quran that address reconciliation point to the practical side of being an agent of reconciliation, emphasising that their role is positive and counts as a good deed. Reconcilers, or those who bring peace among people, carry positive connotations of being people of trust. "*But he who feareth from a testator some unjust or sinful clause, and maketh peace between the parties, (it shall be) no sin for him.*" (Surah 2:182). "*For he is not sinful who makes truce happen.*" (same, translated by Pandža, Čaušević)

Particular attention is paid to marital life and the regulation of relations in which the hierarchy is clearly set and the rules are elaborated in detail. Thus, in the process of marital reconciliation, the role of a reconciler or mediator is to be given to persons from both sides with the common purpose of preserving the union of marriage. "*And if ye fear a breach between them twain (the man and wife), appoint an arbiter from his folk and an arbiter from her folk. If they desire amendment Allah will make them of one mind. Lo! Allah is ever Knower, Aware.*" (Surah 4:35)

The Quran highlights forgiveness as a possible way of reconciliation after a wrongdoing: "*The guerdon of an ill-deed is an ill the like thereof. But whosoever pardoneth and amendeth, his wage is the affair of Allah. Lo! He loveth not wrong-doers.*" (Surah 42:40)

However, the context in which reconciliation is sought is not the same for "weaker ones" and for those more powerful. This depends on the relations of power between the opposing sides. *"So do not falter and cry out for peace when ye (will be) the uppermost, and Allah is with you, and He will not grudge (the reward of) your actions."* (Surah 47:35) There is an impression that victory is a primary value while seeking reconciliation is characteristic of the weaker side.

When internal disagreements arise within a group of believers, who are not enemies, they are called upon to reconcile, and the one who "does wrong" to the other invokes the anger of the community. *"And if two parties of believers fall to fighting, then make peace between them. And if one party of them doeth wrong to the other, fight ye that which doeth wrong till it return unto the ordinance of Allah; then, if it return, make peace between them justly, and act equitably. Lo! Allah loveth the equitable."* (Surah 49:9)

### **Is reconciliation possible by the use of force?**

The segments mentioned so far contained the word *reconciliation* (i.e. Serbian words *pomirenje* or *izmirenje*, TN) whereas the segments below do not, but do represent specific reconciliation options. Thus Moses is represented in conflict over the use of force and reconciliation as follows: *"And when he would have fallen upon the man who was an enemy unto them both, he said: O Moses! Wouldst thou kill me as thou didst kill a person yesterday? Thou wouldst be nothing but a tyrant in the land, thou wouldst not be of the reformers. And a man came from the uttermost part of the city, running. He said: O Moses! Lo! The chiefs take counsel against thee to slay thee; therefor escape. Lo! I am of those who give thee good advice."* (Surah 28:19-20)

The *New Testament* offers the following description of the same event: "And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarrelling and would have reconciled them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you wrong each other?' But the man who was wronging his neighbour thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' At this retort Moses fled, and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons." (Acts 7: 26-29)

A text in the *Old Testament* gives a detailed description of the same central event that changed Moses' life: *"One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and*

*looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand...*" (Exodus 2, 11-22)

Reflecting on this example of a written text on Moses described by three monotheistic religions, I get the impression that it is a single religion, a single God, a single revelation that began at Sinai, with the Decalogue which gave a concrete expression to universal values that distinguish good from evil, violence from peace, justice from injustice, the truth from lies, loyalty from deception. And just like Moses, every one of us stands before the choice of how to solve life's problems.

## **WOMEN AS MEDIATORS OF RECONCILIATION**

### ***Abigail***

Women in the Bible play a significant role in the process of reconciliation. One of those women was Abigail, who had a husband named Nabal. The description of the scene in which Abigail played a central role is recorded in chapter 25 of the first book of Samuel. The title of the chapter is also descriptive: *"Nabal's Unreason and Abigail's Reason"*. *The description of their personalities points to two opposites: "The woman was of good understanding and beautiful, but the man was churlish and ill-behaved;"* (1 Samuel 25:3) Of course, personality traits also determine one's actions, so the text highlights the differences.

The man who passed on information to Abigail told her, "Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them; they were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know this and consider what you should do; for evil is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is so ill-natured that one cannot speak to him." Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two skins of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched grain, and a hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses. And she said to her young men, *"Go on before me; behold, I come after you."* *But she did not tell her husband Nabal.*" (1 Samuel 25: 15-19)

Abigail tried to soothe David's anger with kind words, advocating for her husband by explaining that his behaviour was part of his character and not a matter of his attitude towards

David. She takes on the blame by saying: *"Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt; pray let your handmaid speak in your ears, and hear the words of your handmaid. Let not my lord regard this ill-natured fellow, Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I your handmaid did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent.... And now let this present which your servant has brought to my lord ... Pray forgive the trespass of your handmaid..."* In addressing David, she offers arguments as to why his taking vengeance against Nabal would not be good, saying that no evil had been found in David so far, and that vengeance and bloodshed would be evil which would cause him grief and "pangs of conscience". This was enough for David to refrain from taking vengeance on Nabal and to see Abigail off with words of blessing and peace: *"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand!... Then David received from her hand what she had brought him; and he said to her, "Go up in peace to your house; see, I have hearkened to your voice, and I have granted your petition."* (1 Samuel 25: 32-35). When she came home, Abigail found her husband, who had held a big feast in his house, merry and drunk. So she decided there was no use in telling him anything until the morning. She did what was in her power to do, without condemnation and revenge, and with a sense of understanding and a focus on saving what there was to save.

### ***Esther***

Without going into particulars of the historical events at the time of Esther with respect to political circumstances surrounding the empire, I will highlight the details of the successful attempt to prevent genocide. The description of Esther given in the Bible paints a picture of a beautiful girl who was without both parents: *"He had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother; the maiden was beautiful and lovely, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter."* (Esther 2:7) Regarding the relationship between Mordecai and Esther, trust, mutual respect and obedience are emphasised: *"Now Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had charged her; for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him."* (Esther 2:20) *"Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him."* (Esther 4:17)

A significant detail that triggers reflection is the fact that Esther hides her real identity. The problem of identity seems to be universally present as a straining factor that requires

wisdom in resolving mutual conflicts in all periods and societies, although it has only in recent years become a special subject of scientific study. Erik Erikson (2008) is credited with introducing and popularising this concept. According to him, personal identity develops throughout a person's life through eight phases. However, the expression of identity, its acceptance and rejection, social capital, mutual hatred as a practice of everyday life, have been broadly addressed in social sciences ever since the 1960s. Identity has become an essential subject of research in the context of immigration, nationalism, religion, or women's and gender studies.

Affiliation as part of a person's religious, national, ethnic, regional and other identity played a central role in this case. The wisdom of gradual problem solving is reflected in the strategy. In this context, the relationship between an individual and the group of affiliation is also significant. The Bible emphasises the need to accept and respect both oneself and one's own people. The importance of a positive attitude towards ourselves and our people is highlighted in the Quran as well: *"Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk. The building which they built will never cease to be a misgiving in their hearts unless their hearts be torn to pieces."* (Surah 9:109-110) Both holy books thus make evident the significance of a positive attitude toward oneself, individually and at the group level alike.

The following verses from the Book of Esther underline identity and affiliation: *"Then Queen Esther answered, 'If I have found favour in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.'" (Esther 7:3) "Then Esther spoke again to the king; she fell at his feet and besought him with tears to avert the evil design of Haman the Agagite and the plot which he had devised against the Jews."* (Esther 8:3)

### **The power of a wise woman**

When a riot happens among the same people and the people are divided between different leaders, there is a conflict leading to fratricidal war. In connection with such an event, I selected texts describing the actions of a wise woman who saved her own city through negotiations and handing over of the rebel leader. The act of sacrificing a single person to save an entire people is a paradigm taken over in Christianity to explain the salvation of man by the sacrifice of Christ who, by his act, takes on the sins of others. The woman whose name is not mentioned in the Bible, famous for conducting the negotiations

until the conflict was resolved, appears in search results only in one place, in the phrase "a wise woman". (2 Samuel 20:16)

### ***The power of anonymous women***

The phrase "a (certain) woman" (including its grammatical variants) appears 18 times in different contexts in the Bible. One of the women referred to by this phrase is the woman who killed Emperor Abimelech. It appears as if God's revenge was in her hands, since the Bible notes that this was how God repaid Abimelech for the evil he had done to his father by murdering his seventy brothers: *"And a certain woman threw an upper millstone upon Abimelech's head, and crushed his skull. Then he called hastily to the young man his armour-bearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him.'" And his young man thrust him through, and he died."* (Judges 9: 53-54)

### **PEACE**

Without any elaborate attempts at defining peace, I will start from the simple designation of peace as a social condition in which there is no conflict and no war. It is a definition that reminds me of the definition of health, with the addition that it is not just the absence of "disease" but the presence of some kind of all-encompassing wellbeing, both personal and social. The obvious parallel brings me to the question: Is peace in society, too, a proof of a healthy society? Do conflict and war represent a time and place of disease, or a social pathology of sorts? Or are they just normal periodically alternating processes? Is it even possible for the conditions of peace and war to be "normal(-ised)"? In this context, I would point out the well-known fact that there have been many wars throughout the history and that history has taught us more of wars than of peace

### **The *Quran* on peace**

To be in peace with God, with oneself and with other people is the goal that believers of all religions set before themselves. In the *Quran* peace is also associated with one of God's names. Peace is achieved by obedience to God's will. Allah asks people to build a society of peace and to live in peace, summons them to the abode of peace. (Surah 10:25) *"And if they incline to peace, incline thou also to it, and trust in Allah. Lo! He, is the Hearer, the*

*Knower.*" (Surah 8:61) Man is constantly faced with trials and put before a choice: "*O ye who believe! Come, all of you, into submission (unto Him); and follow not the footsteps of the devil. Lo! he is an open enemy for you.*" (Surah 2:208)

In the Quran, Jesus Christ is presented in several texts bearing a message of peace from birth to death and resurrection. Peace is the reward: "*Peace on him the day he was born, and the day he dieth and the day he shall be raised alive!*" (Surah 19:15,33)

### **Peace in the *Bible***

The topic of peace in the Bible is broadly addressed both in the *Old Testament* and in the *New Testament*. As one of the central ideas of Judaism, I underline the message that the Sabbath from the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue is defined as a day of peace, a day of God's rest, a day that stops transience and conveys believers into the dimension of eternity. In addition to this dimension of religious peace as an offer, inner peace is achieved by respecting the laws.

Wisdom, knowledge and the fear of the Lord are a treasure for those who own them. However, the envoys of peace often weep bitterly. (Isaiah 33:6-7) Sometimes peace is only preached, but not practiced. The message is that violence does not bring peace, that it is difficult to live with those who hate peace, that quarrel is harmful and destructive to family relations, which is often associated with the phrase "a contentious woman", and that there is no peace to evil. Concerning the idea of peace, the New Testament clearly separates unrest in the world from peace in Christ. Peace is promised in the absence of fear.

### ***Peace in everyday speech***

The fact that peace is a value which is explicitly addressed both in the Bible and in the Quran is demonstrated by their usage of "peace" in everyday speech. The question of motivation of behaviour was always relevant. A direct question in the context of the Old Testament was: "Do you come peaceably?" Adonijah, the son of Haggith, came to Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon. When she asked him, "Do you come peaceably?", He replied: "Peaceably." "And Joram said, "Take a horseman, and send them to meet them, and let him say, "Is it peace?"""

In the Old Testament, greeting was extended with the message for peace to be multiplied and for one to go with peace: "King Nebuchadnezzar to all peoples, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you!"; "And thus you shall salute him: 'Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.'"; "Go up in peace to your house;"; "To Darius the king, all peace. "; "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made to him."; "Nevertheless the lords do not approve of you. So go back now; and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines."; "For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace."

The duration of peace often depended on the mode of government. Several verses refer to periods of duration of peace, and times of unrest usually came as a result of lifestyles, sometimes only the rulers', and sometimes of an entire people's: "So the land had rest forty years"; "So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land had rest for eighty years." (Translator's Note: Instead of *rest*, the Serbian version of the Bible in this context uses a phrase containing the word *peace*: "*u miru*").

God is a God of peace, and not of disorder, and therefore advises order in the community: "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace." A clear conscience and freedom bring peace, for all that is not done out of conviction is a sin: "Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding." The kingdom of heaven is righteousness, joy and peace: "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit;" Joy and peace fill the being through hope and faith bestowed by God: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Universal values advocated in the holy books are: good for all people, no revenge, peace to all, for no one to be repaid for evil by evil, doing only what all people believe is good. If possible, and as far as it depends on us, to be in peace with all people.

### ***Orthodox Catechism Textbooks (2017)***

In my recent research I conducted a comprehensive analysis of all Orthodox catechism textbooks used in Serbia for primary and secondary school since 2001 from the aspect of understanding theology (Kuburić 2017b). Here I have analysed only textbooks for the first and sixth grade of primary school, which are in preparation for printing according to the new

curriculum, and the old textbook for the third grade of secondary school (Nikolić 2017, Nikolić 2017, Midić 2005).

In the first grade textbook, the word *reconciliation* is mentioned once, in the context of preparation for the liturgy: "If you are in dispute with someone, reconcile before the Liturgy. Do a good deed in the family or in your class." (p.52) The word *peace* appears as part of the teaching unit about Christmas, containing the following song: "Let peace reign everywhere, Let the heart rejoice, Let everyone become better, and celebrate the Lord." (p. 26)

The texts in the Orthodox catechism textbook for the sixth grade of primary school associate the word *reconcile* with seeking forgiveness and trying not to repeat one's sins. The word *peace* appears in the context of the angelic hymn at Christ's birth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will." Students are taught that our peace depends on our love for God: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him", and "There is no fear in love", and where there is no fear there is peace. Thus, peace is associated with emotions of the absence of fear and the fullness of love. God is presented as a peacemaker and those who build peace are blessed because they shall be called children of God. The greatest Christian holiday celebrates the resurrection, and the textbook brings a message that all people of the world are included in prayers of petition and encouraged to trust God and believe in the significance of Christ's Resurrection.

The textbook for the third grade of secondary school addresses the issue of life and death. The text that highlights the distinction between animals and man focuses precisely on reconciliation which rules the nature's cycles of life and death, whereas it is in the nature of man not to be reconciled with death. Such human aspiration finds its answer in the belief in resurrection, which is a promise based on the resurrection of Christ.

### ***Islamic religious textbooks***

The analysed textbook for the third grade of secondary school bases its interpretation of Islam on the Quran, on the law and on universal values, such as peace, love, tolerance, and responsibility, underlining freedom as the highest value and highlighting that problems with neighbours should be resolved peacefully instead of by means of war. It emphasises that the process of spreading Islam was not carried out violently, but that Islam was spread slowly and discreetly, through peaceful methods alone, thanks to the magnificent truth of the Word of God and to the acceptance of Muhammad's moral character, as outlined in the textbook. An

important way to preserving peace is the peaceful transfer of power. The textbook gives a modern representation of the Declaration on the Principles of Tolerance, in which tolerance is the harmony of diversity, a virtue that contributes to the transformation of a culture of war into a culture of peace.

The Islamic religious textbook for the first grade of primary school mentions peace as used in greetings, meaning: "May God's peace and salvation be upon you!" (p. 7). In the context of a dialogue, the answer that one's heart is now at peace is given in a song at the end of the book: "in the souls is your peace" (p. 69).

### **Conclusion**

Based on common sense, experience and my own – although limited – perspectives, I can conclude that the role of women in all historical periods has, by their very nature, been oriented towards life, peace, love and tenderness. Research in the field of sociology of religion raises the question if religiousness is a woman's destiny? Is the fact that, according to surveys, women are much more religious than men a sign of their weakness and helplessness, or does a woman's religiousness express her need for God's protection? Judging by the Quranic text which suggests that it is the weak ones that are more prone to seeking peace and reconciliation whereas those who have power tend to seek victory, it could be interpreted within the patriarchal context that the activism of women's initiatives for peace and reconciliation, for unity in diversity, is an expression of their weakness. However, it is violence that is an expression of weakness and impotence.

In my analysis of texts from the Bible and the Quran, as well as from a selection of Orthodox religious textbooks, I have presented messages on which monotheistic religions are based, written messages which represent the foundations of all three monotheistic religions and local religious communities established within them. These messages carry universal values which promote the value of life, justice, love, and freedom. Peace is one of the key terms used in many places to describe the desired condition both at a personal, individual level and in relations with other people and with God.

Religion is, in its etymological sense, a process which connects, whether it be teachings or personalities, values or norms, the level of religious organisation or symbols. This integrative power of religion also comes forth in sacred writings which have for centuries offered a narrative that is read and interpreted again and again. In this paper I searched for the

meaning of the word *peace*. Trust and reconciliation are the basis of peace. The starting point of my research was a New Testament text which brings a message of the existence of religion with the aim of reconciling man and God. The backbone of peace for a believer is faith in God's power. A man who is trustworthy is a follower of God who, through his works, confirms his commitment to the wellbeing of others.

A majority of texts which contain the word *peace* focus on advice and examples that lead to peace, emphasising the human contribution to the process of peace-building, reconciliation, and establishing trust. Some of them, which I would like to highlight in conclusion, are: Do your best for God to find you pure, blameless and in peace; preserve your peace and confidence and this will be your strength; refrain from evil and do good; those who make peace are wise; peace in words alone is not enough, as faith without works is not enough; rebuke does not bring joy, but those taught by it have peace; it is good for a man to work in peace and to eat the bread he himself earns; peace encompasses the heart through gratitude and communion; God's peace, which goes beyond every mind, will keep the hearts of believers without fear; preach the good news of peace and be persistent in righteousness and truth; accepting others with love and patience maintains peace; peace is a fruit of the spirit, along with love, joy, goodness, gentleness; a clear conscience and freedom bring peace; hope brings peace; forgiveness brings peace; punishing children for transgressions brings peace in the future; a mild response calms anger and leads to peace; seek peace for the city in which you live, because it is where your own peace abides.

Peace is not just the absence of war, peace is a condition governed by a culture of community, culture of dialogue, culture of building personal and social wellbeing. Religions can contribute to this universal human need if their followers sincerely commit themselves to the core values upon which religion is built, respecting the creation, and not the Creator alone.

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