

### Oddbjørn LEIRVIK: Christian–Muslim Dialogue

homosexuality, however, it is not acceptable to say (as some Muslim students in Norway did when the issue was raised in 2004) that it is up to each state to decide how homosexual practice should be punished (in the worst case, by the death penalty).

In my critical dialogue with Muslims, as a liberal Christian, I will argue that homosexual love relationships are not against Christian or Muslim ethics. Obviously, we will have to live with different views in this respect, both intra- and interreligiously.

But I will draw an absolute line against any form of punishment for homosexuality, be it in the name of Islam, Christianity or any other ideology. As for interreligious relations, I will oppose any kind of religious mobilization that does not respect the integrity and vulnerability of the religiously other.

I will also oppose any kind of political religion that aims at world hegemony in the name of one faith. Absolutist forms of religion can simply not be reconciled with peaceful multireligious co-existence.

These are just a few examples of where the limit to legitimate moral disagreement (in my view) should be drawn: against any kind of religious attitudes or actions that *violate the integrity* of the individual, or the religiously other.

In my interpretation, Christian belief supports such a position, which can draw inspiration from Jesus Christ's border-transcending practice and his enduring care for the vulnerable individual.

But I admit that I would perhaps not have seen this as clearly, were it not for Enlightenment critique of oppressive and intolerant religion, and modernity's focus on the integrity of the individual.

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Jamie MORAN

## Hard Wakan

*It is important to situate the most essential values of human life in a frame that illumines what they 'really' are, and what they are not.*

### I. Moral Values: What They Are Not

Modern understanding and practice of morality seems stuck on one or another of three basic stances: a morality that is too harsh, punitive, rigid (*authoritarianism*); another morality that is too flabby, permissive, weak (*liberalism*); still another morality that is too *above it all*, in some romanticized, idealized, or falsely spiritualized 'world' that escapes too easily from what is arduous at the ground level, and tends therefore to be either facile about the challenge of that level, or cruel in expecting too much from it.

Authoritarianism is a disease of 'heart,' liberalism a disease of 'mind,' and being above-it-all a disease of 'soul.' Authoritarians are hot, but blind, in heart; liberals are cold, but sophisticated, in mind; above-it-alls are elevated, but dissociated, in soul.

Most people, if they are honest, will be able to identify which of these three is their more likely 'home.' But we can also jump around from position to position, like musical chairs. Thus, sometimes people start authoritarian and, discovering the secret fear and violence in authoritarianism, turn liberal; or, they start liberal, and discovering the hidden sentimentality and selfishness in liberalism, turn authoritarian.

Sometimes those who are above-it-all, discovering the secret evasion (safety-seeking) and baseless arrogance in this position, simply become disillusioned and embrace cynicism, once their beautiful bubble gets punctured by reality's sharp edge: then they glory in tearing off the wings of everyone else's butterfly.

Authoritarianism is quintessentially about a heart that cares in the wrong way: it wants to coerce love, truth, goodness. It does not trust the freedom of the human person. It often produces a cramped, inhibited human being, who is offended if other people are too free: they must conform and be cramped, too.

Liberalism is quintessentially about a mind that values its freedom to range widely, but will not engage the difficult and the intractable as it impinges on the heart; authoritarianism at least feels this difficulty and intractability, but it is too afraid of its danger, and seeks an un-free, formulaic solution.

By contrast, liberalism funks the challenge and skates over it, leaving the problem 'free' as a sign of its own (profound) indifference to it. Liberals ultimately are self-indulgent, and leave others to do as they want out of non-engagement with the things in existence that throw us all together in very tough and binding ways.

Being above-it-all is quintessentially an abuse of the 'intimations of immortality' WORDSWORTH famously referred to, in that it is about a soul that wants its natural sense of beauty, potency, and possibility, not to be 'disfigured' or 'limited' by life's losses, ugliness, and need for sacrifice. Thus this soul prioritizes joy over suffering, life over death, and more important, expansion over restriction.

If the authoritarian is over-aggressive and under-sexed (which is why sexual lust and lasciviousness so often explode out when the authoritarian is trying most fervently to keep to the party line), while the liberal is over-sexed and under-aggressive (which is why aggressive nastiness so often explodes out when the liberal is fervently trying to be tolerant, but this tolerance is questioned), then the above-it-all is in a lovely cocoon wafting on clouds, yet one fashioned by a pride that thinks this cocoon makes them above all honest need, and reinforced by a vanity that allows its glory and other positive attributes to be over-estimated—an inflation which holds up only so long as the ever-higher trip does not eventually have to 'fall to earth.'

Authoritarians and liberals may dispute with each other, but the above-it-all is beyond all that; they have the octane fuel that places them outside of all that mess and contention, as they are superior to it.

Mytho-poetically, authoritarians are "Satanic" (moralistic and accusatory), liberals are "Mephistophelean" (mentalistic and relativist), and above-it-alls are "Luciferian" (narcissistic and omniscient). Black and white; grey; colours with no guts, only pastel. Simplistic and cruel; wishy-washy and unconcerned; too airy and light-weight.

It is easy to be harsh and precisely definite when you are fearfully over-simplifying. It is easy to be permissive and endlessly nuanced when you are selfishly indifferent. It is easy to be in the cosmic pudding when you do not have to touch down in the lowlands.

We have all been there, done it, got the T-shirt. That is the statement of what true morality is not.

It is not authoritarianism/conservatism, which tries to forcefully suppress the real problem of human existence in its *ambiguity*; it is not liberalism or relativism, which tries to rationally evade this problem's *bite*; it is not being above it all or superiority, which tries to rise higher out of the problem's *weight*.

None of these 'answers' works. They make the problem worse: we need to embrace, not run from, the ambiguity, bite, weight, of the real problem of human existence. For our heart is inescapably 'bound hand and foot' to that problem.

## II. Moral Values: What They Are

The statement of what true morality is starts with the honest, brave, generous, humble, patient, and respectful acknowledgment that the problem of human existence is hard. It cannot be suppressed, evaded, risen above. It has to be engaged. It has to be committed to. It has to be accepted and suffered; there is no way out of it. There is only a way through. Authentic values help us find, and walk, that way.

There are two other moralities that do not help this walk. One is the *psychopath's amorality*: have a nice day, get out of my way. Psychopathy is interesting not as a clinical disease, but as a false stance in existence's dilemma. The psychopath's out-and-out criminality arises from her or his refusal of vulnerability; she or he thinks she or he can get through, or get an advantage, by toughing it out.

But there are many reasons why this is false, one being that we need our vulnerability as much as our strength to face up to existence. Another is that we need our sensitivity: we cannot act on the world unless we accept that the world can also act on us.

The other morality that does not help the walk is *political radicalism*, without a corresponding spiritual radicalism to anchor it. We must be prepared to go through hell and high water, to let

ourselves be changed by the bracing nature of existence, and then we can wisely alter worldly conditions.

But it is another illusion to think that external changes of environment, however just and necessary, can entirely take the sting out of being in this world. The problem in human existence has an irreducible core, because it was put there by God, and it was intended. There are many ways to express this most basic existential fact, but Zen does it as well as any: "This life is a fire pit. With what attitude of mind do you think you can avoid being burnt?"

True values do not prevent us from being burnt. They help us to get burnt, so that instead of being destroyed by the burning, we are broken and remade by it; burned to ash, hollowed out, rendered transparent, so that a fire and a light and a living water can seize us and bestow upon us a new love, a new creativity, a new truth, a new goodness, one worthy of both our suffering and our genuine potential for greatness.

In Hasidic Judaism, they do not speak of a spiritual master, or expert, or learned or upright person; they refer to a person who is 'proven,' someone tested and proved by existence's problem. Morality helps us to go through this, to emerge out on the other side.

The testing is hard because it is deep, but then so is the proving it brings. The whole thing is paradoxical, costly, hedged by uncertainty and jeopardy and suspense. Existence puts us on an edge, in a gap, on a cross; but the process justifies itself by its result. Its result is the changed human being.

Thus morality, truly understood and practiced, is about the *heart*. Everything else comes in to it, of course: mind, soul, body, inner and outer, visible and invisible, history and nature, the Cosmos and the Earth. But quintessentially it is driven by and about the heart. The deep heart. The passionate, suffering heart. The brave, willing heart.

The heart capable of the most vicious, cowardly, pretentious smallnesses, yet also called to ascend to greatness and descend, plunge all the way down into, depth. For, as Saint MACARIUS of Egypt rightly said, "The human heart is an unfathomable abyss."

Morality addresses one thing only: the struggle—both terrible and beautiful, both fearful and wonderful, both agonized and ecstatic—in the heart, for a new heart, a heart greater and deeper.

Flamenco speaks of the 'duende'—the struggle in the heart that produces 'cante hondo,' deep song; and it says we must 'bear it in the kidneys.'

BODHIDHARMA said, "You will bear the unbearable and endure the unendurable to reach holiness." Morality's true story concerns our deep song, and the long, hard road that leads to our transfiguration, and thus the real divinisation of our humanity. The Lakota call this road 'hard wakan,' the sacredness that is unyielding, inflexible, relentless, because it will not cease from smashing us to bits until we are undone and redone, crucified and resurrected.

*Hard wakan* is also God's 'heartlessness' in not giving up on us, on not allowing anything less than our true greatness through our true deepening. It is God's determination to break our heart, so a new one can be made which will become the home of God's heart. Morality stabilizes us in this hard walk; keeps us at it, waves the Zen stick at us which just says, walk on. Bear. Endure. Be patient. Persevere to the end. Or in Saint Paul's incredible words, hope in everything.

Yet all hope and all despair burn up before we reach our end. Morality hints at the value of the walk and what profound things, not just for us, but for all of creation, are at stake in it. In the end we will not just *see* everything as God sees it, a felicity of the holy mind and holy soul, but we will acquire the capacity to *love* everything as God loves it, and *act* for that love as God acts, bearing and enduring all things, in a Passion that is only spiritually kindled in the holiness of the heart. The deep heart.

Not the heart of superficial attachments, nor driven, deluded and devouring, 'fallen' passions. Not even the desiring heart. But the deeply given, suffering heart, taking the hit of existence and struggling to let itself be opened fundamentally, and fundamentally made self-transcending in the true ecstasy, the ecstasy of self-sacrificing and self-sharing love. 'One who loves, acquires another self.' 'For one who loves, what happens to the other happens to the self.' 'Love is to rejoice with those who are joyful and mourn with those who grieve.'

Hard wakan is the kindling of fire; and with fire, comes light; and with light, comes living water. From the true black and white comes colour, rich, earthy, and finely shaded. There is no other Way. The easy route doesn't go anywhere. The Hard Way, alone, moves.

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Once in movement, then mysterious, miraculous, magically transformative powers are released. Rock and Sea, as Celtic Christianity saw the two primal powers in life. The way is hard for the heart because it resists true greatness and depth. Yet it accords to its yearning too, because whatever the falls, errors, weaknesses, illusions, temptations, the heart is buffeted by, there remains in it a spark of that holy fire of divine heart which seeks to fulfil that calling built in. This spark wants release, and thus constantly says to us, against all the odds in this world that say the converse, be great, go deep.

God has not made existence a problem to trip up the heart and stop it. Paradoxically, only the wound of existence, as I have always called it, which breaks and remakes every human heart which is subjected to its test, can save and prove that calling. For those who respond to it, the rock is a pillow that comforts and renews, strengthens and encourages. But for the arrogant and falsely self-confident, it is the sharp stone on which they stumble.

Morality reveals to us we are a conflicted being, yearning for and called to great-heartedness and depth of heart, but also inclined toward smallness. Every evil passion in the heart—every dishonesty, cowardice, meanness, hatred and hostility, envy and jealousy, luxuriating softness, rationalization, judgmental hardness, inauthenticity, disrespect, pride, vainglory, betrayal and infidelity, lies to self and others, and lack of risk-taking, lack of bearing and enduring—is in a vital sense a failure of the true passion, yet passion must carry on and grow through the failure to something not merely its converse, but something won from the agonized struggle.

Something greater than small-heartedness emerges from the struggle with it, because it has to go deeper really to overcome it. Thus generosity does not just invert or oppose meanness, but by carrying it and suffering it as an inner wound, an inner pain, an inner restriction, gradually overcomes it with something that answers its smallness by having to become deeper. Thus, too, only love is greater than 'good,' because it is deeper than 'evil.' Love is generous, and above all the other values, because it is ecstatic.

To fight and journey in this process of life-long struggle and change is the mark of self-knowledge and self-awareness, of honest self-appraisal, but it is more than that. It is the mark of real



human dignity. It is the proof we have not given in or given up with regard to that spark that drives the heart. It is the real spiritual passion.

Just as existence wounds us in the sense that we must bear and endure many outer things that are hard, so too must we bear and endure many inner things that are hard. Both are the mark of our heart's willingness, of our heart's struggle, through Passion's conflict within itself of lesser and greater, shallow and deep, inauthentic and authentic, to attain a purified and sanctified passion. A holy passion.

Both my Cherokee ancestors and the Eastern Orthodox Christian saint who is among my most admired, DIONYSUS the Areopagite, said: "Fire is in all things, seeking the substance on which it can burn." In the Cherokee Tradition, the Earth is red because it is created of a substance capable of being kindled by divine fire.

If it is the destiny of the heart to catch fire, then morality understood in the true way is what helps us stay with, and dive into, that whole process. When we reach holiness we shed morality, because the fire is in our heart, and the two are and act as one. But morality tells us where we are going, providing both inspiration and constancy on a road that is dusty, long, and hard.

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For the hardest thing facing our heart, ultimately, is not even existence's dæmonic blow, nor our inner struggle as we engage with and commit to it, but the commandment God will not go back on, which is that our heart grow to the greatness of God's Heart, through a paradox of our heart's depth.

Our heart rests on emptiness, nothingness, unfathomableness, into which we dread to fall, should we risk love's self-sacrifice and self-sharing. For in stepping out of self, we sense the giddy feeling of no ground beneath us.

Yet, every self-giving action we risk to that abyss brings God's Fire ever more into it, so that in the end the abyss we fear to fall into, endlessly, becomes the only ground—a 'groundless' ground—upholding our frail heart. Yet that proves sufficient.

That becomes the indwelling of the divine love, a 'mad love,' a 'suffering love,' as Russian Christianity describes it. When we can love—not when we are loved—we feel upheld by love. When we act as God's heart in this world, we know there is a great and deep Heart that upholds our little heart and ultimately will not let it 'fall,' but will bring it through a hard journey and battle to a final celebration, a celebration recognizing no winners and losers, no haves and have-nots, but a common destiny shared by, enjoyed by, relied on, by all.

Knowing the abyss is not empty, because we have leaned on it and acted from it, is the peace that passes all understanding. It is the heart's joy, because it signifies a victory.

The human heart that houses the divine heart is real freedom, for only love makes us free. The experience of being free to choose or not choose love, important to our struggle as it is, is revealed in the end as a half-way, a necessary half truth. Only love is free. Only love knows. Only love sees. Only love acts. Only love bears and endures everything, for the sake of what it is given to. That is its passion. The holy heart reads hearts, and perceives realistically and compassionately, because it has been in the same desert and crossed it on the same bony track.

True values point us there, but we still must walk. We are given to hard wakan. It cannot be magicked away. It leaves scars, but these are also the marks of glory.

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Andrzej RASZYK

## Father and Son

*According to the Bible, one of the most influential books not only of past generations but of our times as well, the wealth of a father can be judged by the number of his sons. Many times it seems that there is no greater joy for a man than to have a male descendant.*

*This relationship, however, works in both directions: the delight of the son is to fulfil the will of his father. The tragedy of the father is to lose or to sacrifice his son, for whatever reason.*

### Your Will Be Done, Father

Nowadays, as many times before in history, the epic of the Patriarch Abraham's sacrifice in Genesis is presented as an outstanding example and model of heroism which is far beyond our everyday usual human understanding.

Fortunately for Isaac, the necessity of the sacrifice is lifted from Abraham at the final moment. But later in history, mirroring this story, there is a Father who actually offers His Son—God, Godself. The son, who chose to sacrifice His own life following the instructions of His Divine Father, is called the Son of God, or Jesus Christ.

And this very Son many times speaks about His full and ultimate commitment to the will of God the Father: "I and the Father are one. The one who sees me sees my Father as well." Voluntarily he offers himself up to His Father: "Your will must be done, not mine." The answer of God to all this is: "You are my own dear Son. I am well pleased with you."

It is a short, but nevertheless characteristic, description of the Father and Son relationship in Biblical understanding. Using that description as a lens for our own times, we can easily notice that a tragic conflict situation has developed between the two mentioned persons. In our culture as well, we are spectators to the heroic fight between fathers and their sons.