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Spiritual Care in Times of War and Displacement

Mahmoud Abdallah / Georg Wenz / Thomas Dreher (Eds.)

Spiritual Care in Times of War and Displacement

Interdisciplinary, intercultural and interreligious
perspectives

Matthias Grünewald Verlag

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Foreword

Omid Nouripour

War has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I was five years old when the Iran-Iraq War began – when food disappeared from the shelves in the shops of my city, relatives vanished without explanation, classmates were sent to the front, and shortages and bombs became the rhythm of everyday life.

Forty-five years later, the subject has never left me – not in my thoughts, not in my heart, not in my memory, and not in my professional life. I have traveled to more war zones than I care to count. I have seen countless people displaced, as I once was – many in far more desperate circumstances and by far more dangerous routes than I experienced. Many human beings live in refugee camps, on the streets, and on rubbish heaps. Many have nothing between them and the open sea but a boat and the hope of a better life.

After all these years, two convictions have remained with me. The first is that there is no peace without reconciliation and no reconciliation without justice. However, justice is profoundly personal and is experienced differently by everyone who has suffered. Persons at war with themselves will never find peace with their neighbors.

This leads to my second conviction: every experience of displacement – like war itself – leaves a wound. Any therapist will tell you as much. No war has ever begun without an injustice at its root, whether real or perceived. This is why coming to terms with the past is a necessity, not a luxury, if we want to prevent the next war.

Some countries seem trapped in cycles of violence that the rest of the world struggles to understand. But when you look more closely – when you witness how people have killed each other's family members at close range and see how deep the suffering runs; when you understand how trauma hardens into a thirst for revenge and how impossible forgiveness feels when no one has ever been held accountable – then you understand the density of the misery. So the behaviour of the protagonists becomes, at least comprehensible.

This is where spirituality comes in. Spirituality will not save lives or enforce a ceasefire. But it can do something politics cannot: open the heart. Without an open heart and some measure of inner peace, no one can find their way out of conflict. You cannot make peace with the world if you are still at war with yourself.

That is what this book is about. It is about finding consolation when despair takes hold, when the news feels unbearable, and when the world presses in from all sides, offering no relief. It's about finding placidity – not one shutting the door to the world, but one that creates space for openness, reflection, and the long, difficult but necessary path toward peace.

Berlin, March 2026

Omid Nouripour

Vice President of the German Federal Parliament

Foreword

Daniel Schipani

The content of this timely book documents a twofold, complex connection involving both suffering and care. The text invites us to reflect on this topic from diverse perspectives, all pointing in the direction of healing and justice. The following paragraph describes that connection with two generalized reminders.

First, one of the clearest universal, non-cultural specific processes affecting all of life on planet earth can be viewed within a simple pattern of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. Most frequently, “disorientation” includes some kind and degree of suffering and, sometimes, death. Obviously, such a process is especially evident in times of war and displacement. Second, across cultures and professional disciplines, all forms of necessary spiritual care consist in *compassionate companionship* in the face of human suffering. And that is especially the case in response to severe crisis and trauma.

Wars and subsequent displacements often result in forced and “voluntary” migrations as painful movement towards reorientation. Social science categories can be applied to describe, interpret, and make care available during that process. Therefore, diverse caregiving strategies are applicable during a time of “accommodation” and “adaptation” within a new cultural and geographic space. The challenges and opportunities of “adaptation”, “assimilation”, and “segregation” also need to be adequately considered. The possibility of eventual “integration” into a new social reality as a hoped-for reorientation might be a caregiving focus as well. The content of this book supplies material for further praxis – that is, the dialectic involving practice and theory – along such a movement beyond traumatic disorientation.

As compassionate companionship in the face of the human suffering caused by war and displacement, spiritual care must operate on three levels. At the *micro* level, caregivers will offer support and guidance to families and individuals; they will function as companions, counselors, and guides. At the *meso* level caregivers will advise and support organizations and institutions; they will educate and offer counsel, for instance regarding programs and strategies for refugee assistance. At the *macro* level, spiritual caregivers will offer policy advice, support the development of organizational identity, and par-

ticipate in advocacy work. In this book, readers will find illustrations of such a variety of caregiving practice.

The text before us, the readers, is an anthology with an expected plurality of voices representing various disciplines and perspectives. They speak different languages, literally, and together they create a harmonious message. They remind us that in the midst of dark times we can still be hope-filled; and, even when it is almost impossible to be hopeful, we can remain engaged with a courageous love that is stronger than death.

San Francisco, March 2026

Daniel Schipani, Dr. Psy., Ph.D.

President, International Association for Spiritual Care (IASC)

Foreword

Erdal Toprakyan

It is highly gratifying when a conference, after months and years of hard work, results in a publication and thus bears fruit. In this case, the editorial team of Mahmoud Abdallah, Georg Wenz, and Thomas Dreher has succeeded admirably. I myself had the privilege of delivering welcoming remarks on behalf of our Center for Islamic Theology at the Tübingen conference in 2023 and would now like to contribute a small foreword to this anthology.

As already emphasized in the subtitle, this volume addresses the hitherto insufficiently explored topic of “Spiritual Care in Times of War and Displacement” not only from an international and interdisciplinary perspective but also from an interreligious one. Furthermore, the countless facets of this unpleasant yet existential subject are illuminated in some contributions from a historical perspective and in others from a contemporary one. The contributions, which are largely anthropological case studies, describe and reflect on conditions for example in prisons or military barracks as well as the suffering of women, men, and children in Guatemala, Egypt, or the Democratic Republic of Congo.

While the question of whether humanity is currently experiencing an extreme crisis or whether we are better off than ever before remains open even after reading this anthology and can be answered differently depending on one’s perspective, there is no doubt that we still face many crises today, often with the potential for global escalation, and therefore need orientation, regardless of how positively or negatively we assess the overall state of the world. This collection serves this purpose, providing not only scholarly insights but also guidance for current and future problems.

Even more frightening than wars or weapons of mass destruction would be the silencing of truly humanistic and pacifist voices. And science, but also religions, must persistently address the suffering caused by war and displacement while at the same time emphasizing the right of every human being to dignity and freedom. Only in this way can we prevent humanity from remaining in a brutal and anti-humanist “state of emergency” where the only concern is – at best – the preservation of “bare” life instead of “self-sufficient” and “qualified”

life as Giorgio Agamben, perhaps the most courageous thinker of our time, tirelessly demands in his writings.

It is to be hoped that the number of scholarly publications on the topic of “war and displacement” in general, and on the topic of “spiritual care” in particular, will continue to increase and that our politicians and also religious communities will also take the findings of these studies into account. In any case, this book which admirably combines theoretical and practical research approaches deserves a wide readership and should become a standard work in my own field of study, Islamic theology.

Tübingen, May 2026

Erdal Toprakyan

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Preface

Mahmoud Abdallah, Georg Wenz, Thomas Dreher

Throughout history, wars have caused immeasurable suffering. The consequences of armed conflict are extensive and multifaceted, encompassing a wide range of detrimental outcomes. These include loss of life through aerial bombardment, targeted drone strikes and missile attacks, the arbitrary killing of civilians by snipers, injuries from landmines, massacres, torture and rape. Not to mention the mistreatment of prisoners of war and the physical and mental anguish experienced by those caught up in the conflict. Other factors contributing to psychological fatigue, exhaustion and breakdown include the loss of loved ones, friends and neighbors, family breakdown, food shortages, hunger and malnutrition, and emotional and financial exhaustion. Chronic mental stress, despondency, despair and agony, along with the physical symptoms of this psychological distress, must also be added to the list. As if that were not enough, the consequences of war include uncertainty about the fate of those missing for a long time, desperate hope for their return and delayed mourning. The abduction of children and women; the destruction of social structures, housing, streets and cultural sites; attacks on energy sources and transport infrastructure; makeshift emergency supplies; loss of possessions; overcrowding of hospitals; and scarcity of medical resources are just a few more effects of war. Finally, in addition to the loss of human life and the devastation of urban areas and natural habitats, there are potentially catastrophic environmental consequences resulting from soil contamination, critical infrastructure bombardment (i. e., oil reservoirs) and ground poisoning.

These effects of warfare have been thoroughly documented, and it has been demonstrated that they exacerbate the humanitarian situation. Consequently, millions of people are forced to flee their homes. However, after displacement, flight, and expulsion, they often can't find relief. The psychological and emotional distress experienced by individuals in conflict zones often persists, exerting a profound influence on their social structures and intergenerational well-being. While the immediate context of conflict makes the human financial and material costs of warfare apparent, the long-term consequences of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder affect multiple genera-

tions, extend to new living environments and make the costs of wars endless.

Reading the statement “No one is born for war”, made by a Ukrainian woman who had experienced the destruction caused by nightly bombardments of her home, compels the following thought: “And no one is born to be displaced.” Thousands of people die on the route while trying to evade aggression and find refuge. Many more are subjected to further violence while fleeing war-torn regions, with women and children being particularly vulnerable. Furthermore, many individuals are mistreated at borders where authorities use various methods to control the flow of people. Generally, those who manage to escape experience profound traumata a second time.

A closer examination of countries and regions that have become destinations for refugees indicates that war, displacement and forced migration have had significant ramifications for these areas, affecting them profoundly at political, economic and societal levels. In light of these developments and the interplay between societal concepts and political discourse on migration and internal security, providing individual support and nurturing personal resilience is paramount. There is also an increased demand for scientific research that reflects the circumstances and effects of forced migration. Such research spans various disciplines, including sociology, politics, constitutional law, psychology, and religion.

This publication examines support programs in a number of countries and fields worldwide. It analyses their strategies and the specific measures they have implemented. The importance of first aid services and long-term programs is also emphasized. Those in need of support are invariably at the center of attention, including underage orphans, persecuted civilians (particularly women), but also soldiers struggling to come to terms with their past actions.

Considering these different dimensions, it is crucial to highlight the role of the aggressors, whose self-proclaimed historical significance is, at best, questionable. However, as the renowned essayist and philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote in his 1940 essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” it is imperative to examine history from the perspective of the oppressed, not the oppressors. Benjamin wrote, “Even the dead will not be safe from the enemy when he wins. And the enemy keeps winning.”¹ He consequently recognized the central function of the historian as protecting the memory of what has been

¹ Translation by the editors.

endured from reinterpretation susceptible to political interests, establishing the parameters by which history is interpreted. Since the prevailing narrative is often shaped by the victor's perspective, the historian's task becomes "brushing history against the grain."

Remarkably, Benjamin wrote the "Theses" shortly before attempting to escape Nazi persecution in occupied France for Spain. In September 1940, the Jewish intellectual tragically died in the Spanish border town of Portbou.

In 1994, a memorial was erected in the Spanish border town of Portbou to commemorate Benjamin's death and those of other exiles during World War II.

Walter Benjamin was not the only one to have had this suffering; his tragic fate was not an individual case. Since his death, countless victims have been forced to seek refuge in other countries, both neighboring and distant. Thousands have died along the way. Others are forced to endure longer stays in reception camps for asylum seekers. Each of these individuals has a unique story, some of which are revealed while others remain silent forever. Providing a platform through which the voices of the disempowered, marginalized, and displaced can be heard and their concerns addressed is a fundamental step in the pursuit of justice. Moreover, acknowledging their cries, even if they are inaudible, is an essential act of humanity. Spiritual care recognizes this exceptionally well.

Every human being is both an individual and an integral part of humanity. According to the Lithuania-born French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, being human is characterized by an inherent responsibility towards the other. This responsibility is inescapable, even if ignored. It establishes intersubjectivity and becomes evident in the ethical significance of another person's "visage," which transcends their physiognomic features. Thus, every encounter with another person is marked by their unspoken ethical appeal. Also, the sacred scriptures of both Christians and Muslims, the Bible and the Quran, know about the concept of primordial intersubjective responsibility. It arises from their metaphysics of creation. Created as a pair, humankind is fundamentally interdependent. Actions that alleviate the suffering of others consequently point to, or even express, the divine order of peace and justice.

One of the most notable metaphors for the interconnectedness of humanity can be found in the works of the British poet John Donne. In his poem "For Whom the Bell Tolls," also known as "No Man Is an Island," Donne writes:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
In addition, if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

The saying "No man is an island" highlights the interconnectedness of human beings. It suggests that individuals belong to a larger structure, and that every loss experienced by one person profoundly impacts life itself. Therefore, an individual's suffering is not merely a matter of singular fate. With this understanding, "hearing the bell" changes our perception of what it means to be human.

In such situations of suffering, displacement, and loss, spiritual care plays a key role in providing support. Spiritual care is grounded in the holistic belief that body, mind, psyche, and soul are interconnected. With a compassionate and humane approach, spiritual care addresses an individuals' existential, spiritual, and religious needs. It emphasizes the role of spirituality in improving the quality of life and well-being, particularly in situations involving severe injury, trauma, and death. Recognizing the uniqueness of each individual and considering their interpersonal relationships and losses makes it evident that their needs are distinct and influenced by personal history, religious beliefs, and group values.

A foundational principle of spiritual care is preserving the autonomy and dignity of all individuals. Needs, particularly spiritual ones, are approached with the utmost respect, whether or not they are expressed and addressed with the same respect. As the articles in this publication demonstrate, spiritual care is especially beneficial for individuals experiencing crises due to displacement or forced resettlement from war zones. This is because spiritual care incorporates overcoming existential challenges into the treatment of acute physical ailments. Questions about the meaning of life, evil, theodicy, suffer-

ing, death, and loss become an integral part of the treatment process and are not merely touched upon in passing.

The effectiveness of spiritual care depends on its interdisciplinary nature. The collaboration of medical, psychological, nursing, and other therapeutic disciplines, along with integrating religious and spiritual support, fosters a multifaceted interplay of competencies and skills. Sometimes, one person requires these diverse areas of expertise. For instance, a physician may be the initial point of contact for individuals experiencing trauma who require comprehensive care from the beginning.

Spiritual care is a person-centered approach. However, personal contexts, as well as politics, society, and the economy, are underlying factors that influence people's lives. Therefore, spiritual care is increasingly based on empirical studies. Drawing from a variety of traditions, the term "spiritual care" also addresses the spiritual needs of non-religious individuals.

As a highlight of meaning and outcome of many years' work on and for spiritual care, in 2015, the International Association for Spiritual Care (IASC) was founded in Bern. The mission of the institution is to "enhance the capacities of scholars and practitioners worldwide in acquiring, disseminating, and applying knowledge of the theory and practice of spiritual care, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary, interreligious, and intercultural scholarly investigation."² Since then, conferences have been held in Bern, Jerusalem/Bethlehem/Beit Jala, New York, Tübingen, and Chicago, with online conferences held in between. According to its website, the association "offers vital continuing education opportunities, encourages networks for professional support and enrichment, and facilitates growth and interdisciplinary innovation engaging in medicine, psychology, theology, nursing, and social work."³ Meanwhile, an international network of scholars and practitioners has developed worldwide. By providing a space for reflection on the many aspects of spiritual care, the IASC fosters inspiration between academic and practical work. Discourse with society members and practitioners since the association's inception showcases the diversity of spiritual care approaches, including

² What Is Spiritual Care? Perspectives from Different Professions and Religious Traditions. Ed. by Pamela Cooper-White. Coed. by Claudia Kohli Reichenbach and Emmanuel Y. Lartey. Epilogue by Ivone Gebara, Eugene, OR 2026, viii.

³ comp. <https://internationalassociationforspiritualcare.org/mission-statement/> [26.07.17]

non-religious perspectives. This allows people to benefit from an open and broad approach to their spiritual needs.

The contributions in this volume are one result of the global dialogue and international cooperation. Most of them stem from the Tübingen conference of the same name which focused on the needs of refugees and took place in the autumn of 2023. The conference brought together professionals from various fields, responsibilities, religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and life philosophies. These professionals engaged in personal encounters and scholarly exchanges. The challenges of providing spiritual care to refugees and migrants revealed the need for a high level of cultural, ethical, and religious sensitivity. The articles presented here reflect the challenges and strengths associated with this kind of care. The articles are organized into three sections related to war, trauma, and migration. Additionally, there is a reflection on the spiritual resources that ground spiritual care in different religions, images, and time periods.

1. Spiritual Care in Times of War and Trauma

In her article *Religious and Spiritual Resources for Coping with Trauma Among Refugees*, **Lydia Maidl** provides a thorough overview of spiritual care. She outlines its practical applications and introduces key experiential dimensions, theoretical foundations, and impulses for self-reflection and professional practice. Drawing on her experience, Maidl illustrates how working with refugees inevitably brings one's own worldview and Western social influences into focus. In the fields of spirituality and religion in particular, it is crucial for psychosocial, therapeutic, and educational professionals to be mindful of their attitudes and emotional responses, including those shaped by past experiences, such as feelings of helplessness. Incorporating this awareness into counseling and therapeutic work means taking others seriously, challenging stereotypes, and actively contributing to the prevention of radicalization.

Drawing on case studies and empirical research, Maidl emphasizes the crucial role of faith, religion, and spirituality in coping with displacement and migration experiences, particularly for traumatized individuals. Narratives and texts addressing displacement and trauma can serve as valuable coping resources across different religious traditions. However, struggling to find meaning in what has happened can lead to either personal growth or despair and bitterness. Therefore, Maidl advocates integrating personal questions and interpreta-

tions into a holistic approach to care. Lastly, by engaging with unfamiliar aspects of life, those involved in care gain a better understanding of the people they work with.

In her contribution, *Principles for Spiritual Care? Moral Involvement and Ethical Sensitivity in Dealing with Trauma*, **Lea Chilian** explores the ethical dimensions of spiritual care, particularly when working with traumatized persons. She emphasizes the ambivalence of spirituality, which can have healing or destructive effects, and argues that practitioners must consider these risks. In situations of war, displacement, and existential crisis, for example, spiritual convictions may become a source of additional suffering rather than comfort. Building on this idea, Chilian discusses principles for ethically responsible spiritual care. She advocates for ethical sensitivity, which requires caregivers to examine their own moral beliefs and biases. However, she maintains that principles alone are insufficient. They need to be translated into one's own involvement. Only through such self-reflexivity can spiritual care responsibly address the ambivalent power of spirituality, avoiding the reinforcement of harm while supporting patients' individual spiritual resources.

In *Women Migrants in Times of War*, **Pamela Cooper-White** analyzes the global reality of forced migration affecting women and girls, emphasizing that they are disproportionately impacted by war-related displacement and gender-based violence. Using international data, Cooper-White demonstrates that sexual, physical, and psychological violence against female migrants occurs throughout all phases of migration. However, this violence is often underestimated, overlooked, ignored, silenced, or rendered invisible in legal definitions, political discourse, media narratives, and academic research.

Cooper-White asserts that prevalent Western models of trauma and refugee protection inadequately address the cumulative, chronic, and culturally ingrained nature of violence against women. She criticizes the marginalization of gender-based violence within trauma frameworks, calling for greater attention to women's agency, cultural context, and their lived interpretations of suffering. Three "matters for attentiveness" in spiritual and pastoral care are central to her approach: honoring self-determination, ethical witnessing of suffering, and supporting meaning-making. Ultimately, the article advocates for justice-oriented, intercultural forms of care that center women's voices and resist the ongoing erasure of their traumata in contexts of war and displacement.

In her article, *Traumaisensible Supervision in einer Post-Konflikt-Gesellschaft. Der Fall Guatemala* (Trauma-Sensitive Supervision in a Post-Conflict Society. The Case of Guatemala)⁴, **Vilma Duque** highlights the vital role of trauma-sensitive supervision in Guatemala, a post-conflict society that had been affected by decades of civil war and severe human rights violations. Supervision was introduced as a safe space where teams could find emotional relief and receive professional support while coping with the lingering effects of violence. Duque's approach explicitly links the individual and societal dimensions of trauma. She emphasizes that contextual sensitivity and group-based processes are essential tools for addressing collective trauma.

Through Karla's case, a former staff member of an international commission against impunity, Duque illustrates how supervision can provide vital support in situations involving emotional burnout, anxiety, and experiences of persecution. Supervision enables stabilization, encourages self-care, and opens pathways toward new meaning and direction. Beyond mere professional reflection, trauma-sensitive supervision has a healing potential that strengthens resilience and deepens understanding of psychosocial trauma. In authoritarian contexts in particular, it fosters safe communication, breaks silences, and reinforces democratic structures. Thus, Duque shows that supervision has therapeutic and political significance, contributing to broader social transformation processes.

In *War, Trauma and the Soldier's Soul*, **Thomas Thiel** reflects on his experience as a military chaplain in Germany and Afghanistan. He worked closely with traumatized soldiers and encountered the realities and dangers of war firsthand. Drawing on these experiences, Thiel sheds light on aspects of war that are often overlooked or silenced in society. One such aspect is a disturbing fascination with blood, violence, and hysteria triggered by war that can transform into lust. It is no wonder that facing such dynamic acts of war deeply affect soldiers, dividing their inner worlds and continuing to shape their lives long after active service ends.

Although soldiers volunteer to risk their physical and psychological well-being, Thiel portrays them as victims in a society that represses and ignores their experiences. In this context, spiritual caregivers face significant demands. They must continuously reflect on their emotional responses and possess strong self-regulation skills to effectively work with their traumatized patients. In addition, spiritual

⁴ All titles of German-language articles are translated by the editors.

caregivers must be trustworthy and well-versed in psychotraumatology. Finally, they need to be open to both sides of a soldier's story: that of the perpetrator and that of the victim, and treat different value systems with respect. He further highlights the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration, noting that it is most effective when guided by a spirit that fosters liberation and connection beyond the conventional boundaries of faith and professional roles.

Peter Pogany-Wnendt's article, *Inherited Trauma – Transgenerational Wounds of the Shoah*, explores how unresolved Holocaust experiences affect subsequent generations of both victims and perpetrators. Using psychoanalytic concepts and autobiographical reflections, the author demonstrates how emotions such as grief, fear, shame, guilt, and aggression can be transmitted unconsciously across generations and reactivated in present-day relationships and encounters. These emotional inheritances burden descendants with the impossible task of processing what their parents and grandparents were unable to mourn or acknowledge.

Pogany-Wnendt emphasizes that the encapsulated trauma of survivors and the denied guilt of perpetrators shape family dynamics, restricting children's autonomy and leading to emotional entanglements that recreate victim-perpetrator relationships. He argues that liberation from these patterns is possible through awareness, differentiation, and mourning. By recognizing inherited emotions as distinct from their own experiences, descendants can relinquish unconscious feelings of responsibility and develop a compassionate yet autonomous stance toward their family history. The author ultimately highlights dialogue, empathy, and solidarity as essential foundations for restoring broken human connections and resisting the transmission of dehumanization into the future.

2. Spiritual Care and Migration

In *Islamic Spiritual Care for Refugees! Theoretical Observations and Case Studies*, **Mahmoud Abdallah** outlines the development and significance of Islamic spiritual care (ISC) in settings such as prisons, hospitals, hospices, and refugee accommodations. Drawing on his experience in education programs for Islamic pastoral care as well as in the MA study program in Islamic Practical Theology for Pastoral Care and Social Work at the University of Tübingen, initiated nearly a decade ago, Abdallah presents ISC as an evolving interplay of practical engagement, theoretical reflection, and historical tradition.

Rooted in concepts such as *birr* (Piety) and Quranic sources, ISC provides valuable spiritual resources for migrants and displaced individuals while necessitating trauma sensitivity and contextual awareness.

Through case studies of Syrian women and young refugees, Abdallah illustrates the supportive and challenging aspects of faith during displacement. Islamic spiritual care can address language barriers, mistrust, and feelings of being dismissed, while engaging with issues of identity loss, self-acceptance, reconciliation with the old and new society, moral dilemmas, and personal histories of suffering. Abdallah highlights that ISC promotes integration, women's emancipation, and long-term personal development. The author shows that the refugees have come here to stay. Abdallah views (unlike Ince, see her article below) the wish to return as a momentary feeling that tends to express doubt and a request for help, rather than a true, serious desire to return. Therefore he demands more interdisciplinary and interfaith support programs. Thus, the article contributes to the transformation of Muslim communities within their new social and cultural contexts.

In his contribution *Der stumme Wunsch nach Rückkehr. Die Rückkehr in die Heimat für ausländische Gefangene und ihre Bedeutung für die islamische Gefängniselsorge* (The unspoken longing to return. The return home for foreign prisoners and its significance for Islamic prison chaplaincy), **Serkan Ince** explores the frequently unspoken desire to return home among foreign inmates and considers its implications for Islamic prison chaplaincy. Drawing on his extensive experience at the prison of Rottenburg, he reveals that many incarcerated migrants harbor a deep longing to return to their countries of origin despite having once risked everything to build a life in Europe. However, this desire is often weighed down by unrealistic expectations, financial pressures, family obligations, and fears of stigmatization.

Ince argues that Islamic prison chaplaincy must address this ambivalence with a holistic approach integrating spiritual, psychosocial, and practical dimensions. Based on core Islamic principles like divine mercy, repentance, and human dignity, chaplaincy can foster self-worth, resilience, and self-acceptance among inmates. At the same time, it should promote realistic planning, empowerment, and vocational preparation to facilitate sustainable reintegration, whether in Germany or the country of origin.

The article stresses the importance of closer collaboration between chaplaincy, psychological services, and social institutions. It also advocates for the establishment of structured return counseling within

prison ministry. Lastly, Ince presents Islamic pastoral care as a vital resource for fostering hope, agency, and responsible life planning among foreign prisoners.

In the annotated workshop report *Spiritual Care für Frauen in der Demokratischen Republik Kongo im Rahmen ganzheitlicher Behandlung von Traumata* (Spiritual Care for Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the Context of Holistic Treatment of Traumata), **Gisela Schneider**, together with **Rose Mumbere**, discuss spiritual care in the context of the prolonged war, violence, and trauma in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The country's history of colonization, political instability, and economic exploitation continues to influence daily life, especially in the Eastern regions where numerous militias perpetrate violence against civilians. Women and children make up the majority of internally displaced persons and are especially vulnerable to severe human rights violations.

Rose Mumbere applies a holistic "One Step Approach" that integrates psychosocial, spiritual, social, economic, and legal support for traumatized women. By this, she is referring to the work of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege at Panzi Hospital, Bukavu, DRC. Her report emphasizes the crucial role of the churches, religious leaders, and spirituality in fostering healing and supporting peace processes within refugee camps and the society at large. Schneider and Mumbere assert that addressing trauma in the DRC requires both local engagement and a global commitment to justice, peace, and sustainable transformation.

In her article, *Seelsorge mit Menschen in verkürzten Asylverfahren an der europäischen Außengrenze* (Pastoral care for people undergoing accelerated asylum procedures at the European external border), airport chaplain **Tanja Sacher** describes the harsh conditions faced by asylum seekers at Frankfurt Airport where they undergo accelerated asylum procedures under detention-like conditions while having to remain in the transit zone. Managed by both the Federal Police and the Federal Office for Refugees and Migration⁵, individuals are routinely screened, and their cases are processed within 19 days, with many facing swift denials and deportations. The Church Refugee Service provides critical support, offering legal guidance, trauma-sensitive counselling, and spiritual care to help vulnerable persons navigate the complex system they are faced with. This is especially crucial as many asylum seekers suffer from severe traumata due to experiences

⁵ Bundesamt für Flüchtlinge und Migration (BAMF).

in war zones, violence, and persecution, and are at risk of re-traumatization. The KFD⁶ uses various techniques to provide immediate psychological stabilization, including body-focused exercises, imaginative therapies, and faith-based resources. These techniques aim to restore feelings of agency and hope. Despite facing severe language, legal, and procedural barriers, the KFD advocates for humane treatment and fair hearings, thus attempting to ease the intense psychological toll of detention and possible deportation on asylum seekers. In addition, the article points out the agonizing nature of the asylum process and refers to the importance of resilience, compassion, and external support.

3. Reflections on Spiritual Care across Different Areas and Times

In *Spiritual Resources in a World of Displacement and Violence – Metaverse Thinking as Paradigm and Source of Hope and Transformation? From homo digitalis to homo sympatheticus*, **Daniel J. Louw** reflects on the profound anthropological and spiritual shifts brought about by digitalization and metaverse thinking. He describes the transformation of the playful human (*homo ludens*) into the digital human (*homo digitalis*) and explains how transcendence becomes technologized through virtual spaces, optimization strategies, and digital forms of meaning-making. Social media platforms foster a spirituality of immediacy and relationality, through which human existence is increasingly mediated by the digital other.

Against this backdrop, Louw raises critical theological questions, such as whether traditional concepts of God's omnipotence are being replaced by the superconsciousness of cloud computing and how faith traditions might be rearticulated within digital paradigms. Louw situates these reflections within the challenges of the Anthropocene and Metacene, emphasizing the ethical responsibility to protect the planet and emerging technological spheres from exploitation. Building on the concept of *cura animarum* (care of souls), Louw proposes an expanded vision that includes *cura terrae* and *cura pro spacio* (care for the earth and care for space). Grounded in the theological concept of mercy (*misericordia*), he presents a pneumatology of diachronic pangenethism as a spiritual framework of compassion, presence, and hope in a digital world marked by alienation and violence.

⁶ Kirchlicher Flüchtlingsdienst (KFD).

In their collaborative work, *Art as a Medium for Peace and Its Role in Encountering Wars*, **Mohamed Zenhoum**, **Rasha Hassan**, and **Ibrahim Badawy** explore how visual art can document conflict, preserve cultural memory, and promote social reconciliation. Since ancient times, art has been a powerful medium for expressing both the trauma of war and the hope for peace. Examples range from ancient Egyptian reliefs commemorating the Battle of Kadesh to modern memorials, such as Egypt's October War Panorama. Thus, artworks employ a sophisticated visual language, such as carefully employed hierarchical compositions and the conscious use of symbolic colors, to convey complex narratives of sacrifice and national identity, thus influencing the shaping of collective memory. The researchers ultimately argue that art's unique capacity to juxtapose the brutality of war with symbols of peace enables it to serve multiple functions.

The article shows that art can achieve both. On the one hand, it can draw attention to experiences of death and loss. On the other hand, it can promote coexistence and belief in possible progress. Through an in-depth analysis of diverse examples from Egypt, the Islamic world, and Europe, the paper demonstrates how visual culture can challenge nationalist narratives, illustrate abstract concepts such as martyrdom, and facilitate reconciliation within divided societies through nonverbal communication. The findings propose a framework for using art in postwar recovery, emphasizing its role in preserving memory and inspiring social solidarity. Through its synthesis of aesthetic innovation and cultural preservation, art emerges as an active participant in the struggle for peace, not merely a record of conflict.

This anthology ends with the contribution by **Dominiek Lootens** *Welcoming the Stranger: The Ministry of the Russian Catholic Émigré Hélène Iswolsky*. The author portrays the life and work of Hélène Iswolsky (1896–1979) as a compelling example of spirituality shaped by exile, displacement, and historical upheaval during the first half of the twentieth century. A two-time refugee during the Russian Revolution and World War II, Iswolsky's biography reflects the realities of migration and loss while highlighting spiritual resilience in exile. Iswolsky was a translator, writer, and intellectual leader within Russian émigré communities. She later founded the ecumenical movement *The Third Hour* in the United States.

Lootens emphasizes that Iswolsky's conversion from Russian Orthodoxy to Catholicism through the Benedictine tradition allowed her to recognize important similarities between Eastern and Western

spiritual traditions. Her collaboration with figures such as Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement demonstrates her commitment to social justice, hospitality, and solidarity with marginalized groups. Through Iswolsky's life and legacy, the article illustrates how a creative and reflective spirituality can foster ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue and offer ethical guidance in times of war, fascism, and displacement—a relevance that remains until today.

As the contributions in this anthology demonstrate, there is a wide range of possible perspectives and approaches to the topic, and the authors bring valuable insights drawn from their diverse experiences, making the publication relevant and engaging for a broad readership.

This publication is based on a joint conference, which was organized by the Center for Islamic Theology (ZITh) at the University of Tübingen, the Protestant Academy of the Palatinate, the Protestant Hospital Chaplaincy in Württemberg, and the International Association for Spiritual Care (IASC). Numerous people contributed to the planning and successful realization of the conference, and we would like to express our sincere gratitude to all of them.

Our special thanks go to the Laubach Foundation (Mainz), the Foundation Stuttgarter Lehrhaus für interreligiösen Dialog, and the Protestant Academy of the Palatinate for their generous financial support which made this publication possible through a subsidy toward the printing costs. We would also like to express our sincere appreciation to the Center for Islamic Theology and the University of Tübingen for their generous hospitality as well as to all our partners for the pleasant and productive collaboration. We would further like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to Peter Bäuerle-Benzing, Christina Obermeier and David Schipani for their dedicated and meticulous editorial work. Finally, we are sincerely grateful to Mr. Volker Sühs for his careful supervision of the publication process on behalf of the publisher.

Tübingen/Speyer, March 2026

I. Spiritual Care in Times of War and Trauma

1. Religious and Spiritual Resources for Coping with Trauma Among Refugees

Lydia Maidl

In our Western world, therapy and psychosocial counseling rarely focus on religion and spirituality. The faith, religion, and spirituality of people with lived experience of forced displacement or migration are usually neither addressed nor integrated into therapy and counseling. Their significance remains hidden, either serving as a personal resource or posing a challenge¹, except in the work of some psychotherapists, or transcultural clinics.

However, over the past few decades, health professionals have become increasingly aware that our three-dimensional model of health which encompasses the physical, psychological, and social aspects needs to expand to include existential and spiritual dimensions. These dimensions are essential to all human beings, particularly those who have experienced migration, especially forced migration. Many of these individuals come from regions and cultures where faith, religion, and/or spirituality play significant roles in daily life.²

Therefore, professionals in psychosocial, therapeutic, and educational fields should acquire competencies in this area. Awareness and training are needed.

I am pleased and grateful that this conference is dedicated to this field of work. Over the last ten years, I have pursued the following goals in various training programs:

1. I want the carers to become more capable of talking about these issues in a professional context.
2. I want the accompanying persons to become more aware of their own attitudes and emotions in this field, including their previous ex-

¹ Cf. İlhan İlkilic, *Der muslimische Patient. Medizinethische Aspekte des muslimischen Krankheitsverständnisses in einer werthepluralen Gesellschaft*. Münster – Hamburg – London, 2002; Jan İlhan Kizilhan, *Die Bedeutung der Religion und Spiritualität in der Traumatherapie bei Menschen aus islamischen Ländern*, in: *Trauma. Zeitschrift für Psychotraumatologie und ihre Anwendungen* 18,2 (2020), 10–21, here 11.

² Cf. Kizilhan, *Die Bedeutung der Religion und Spiritualität*; Lydia Maidl, *Religion und Spiritualität in transkultureller Perspektive*, in: Jan İlhan Kizilhan – Claudia Klett (eds.), *Lehrbuch Transkulturelle Traumapädagogik*. Weinheim – Basel, 2023, 121–150.

periences, stereotypes, and personal shyness, insecurity, and fear of potential religious violence.

3. I want the healthcare professionals to become more sensitive of that religion, faith and spirituality can be both a burden and a resource for people after (forced) migration. In this lecture, I will focus on the perception and promotion of religious and spiritual resources. My theses are as follows:

1. Implementing this dimension in therapy and counseling is essential to encountering people as equals with respect. They experience acceptance and value for an essential part of their personality. This promotes physical and mental health. Including this dimension in one's work does not require belonging to the same religion or being a believer.

2. Integrating this dimension into personal encounters helps break down stereotypes and "enemy images" on both sides. The 2023 "Religionsmonitor" published by the Bertelsmann Stiftung emphasizes the great importance of creating opportunities for encounters at eye level for several reasons.

First: Attitudes toward religious pluralism in Germany are less open than they were ten years ago. 34% of the people answered that religious diversity is a threat, 29% said it was an enrichment while 37% were undecided.³ Second, it is evident that the more people interact with individuals of different religions and cultures, the more they value religious diversity. Therefore, integrating spiritual and religious concerns into healthcare is important "grassroots" work to counteract the formation of parallel worlds and the extremist dangers of the religious and cultural polarization of conflicts.

There are three steps to introduce a few aspects of this broad field:

1. Faith, religion, and spirituality as they present themselves to people with lived experience of forced displacement or migration in our postsecular society.
2. Spiritual care: What is it?
3. Baselines: trauma, religion, coping.

³ Marcel Mücke et al., *Zusammenleben in religiöser Vielfalt. Why Plurality Must Be Designed. Religionsmonitor 2023 der Bertelsmann Stiftung*, Gütersloh 2023, 54.