The Concept of Education and the Concept of Family in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

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I. The Concept of Education

1. The Concept of Education in Judaism
(Prof. Dr. Hanan Alexander, University of Haifa)

In the Jewish concept of education God serves as ultimate role model. In Rabbinic Judaism the Rabbis envisioned God in their own image, both as teacher of Torah and eternal student. God teaches "Torah", which can be literally translated as "instruction" or "teaching". He is the teacher, leading students to understand. The importance of the role of a teacher is expressed in the dictum that if there is the need to choose between saving one's teacher or one's parents, a student should choose the teacher, because he will bring the student in next world. Since God is the ultimate teacher, studying the Torah is worshipping God. The rabbinic literature consists of the format of question and answer. With its dialogical character it emphasizes the pedagogical relevance of asking questions of both student and teacher. The significance is illustrated by Gods dialogical model in Eden (e.g., Gen 4).

Furthermore, pedagogy is grounded in love. That must be understood from the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. Israel is loved by God and is meant to love God back. God's authority is not coercive. Coercive power might be a good way to train a student, because it leaves no room for the children to rebel and to force their own will. Yet, teaching is not about blind acceptance of commandments and mechanical repetition, but internalization. The dialogical relationship of teacher and student aims at understanding based on learning. Relevant for the student is to comprehend how to adopt it into one's own life. Mechanical learning can be a means to understanding, but it is not an aim in itself. Therefore, reflected teaching is to be implemented. It entails intelligence and consequently enables students to make moral decisions on their own. Mechanical training can be equated with indoctrination, which is amoral and undermines independent reasoning and free will. The substance of teaching are norms, not rules. Rules have a mechanical character and require little understanding. Contrarily, norms are intelligent guides for moral and religious thought and reasons upon to choose. A theology, that understands God as teacher, comprehends him as role model. Accordingly, the pedagogy is not didactic but dialogical and the instruction is a vision of a good life. The person who one is meant to be, is provided by the Torah and one must strive to become that person and to be internalized as moral voice.

Summary: Valerie Jandeisek

2. The Concept of Education in Christianity
(Prof. Dr. Manfred Pirner, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

The idea of education/teaching is present in Christianity since the very beginning, with the New Testament portraying Christ himself as a teacher who gathered a circle of students around him. Early Christian teaching tended to focus on those who were not otherwise highly educated, paying special attention to the disadvantaged. This focus is also present in the epistles of St Paul, although he also reaches out to a more educated audience with the integration of Torah teachings and arguments from Greek philosophy.

Besides this focus, the Christian understanding of education first established by St Paul also includes a particular balance between appreciating and relativizing the significance of education and an emphasis on education as a community endeavour. This basic understanding has been further articulated by various later Christian thinkers, particularly during the Reformation, which can also be regarded as an educational movement. Luther's idea that everybody should be able to read the Bible for themselves and the concept of the "priesthood of all believers" highlight the necessity for universal education.

 In the modern period, education from a Christian perspective is seen as grounded in the God-given dignity of human beings and therefore every person has a right to a holistic education, an idea borne out in both the Second Vatican Council and a recent document of the World Council of Churches. This also requires a certain focus on educational justice and equity. The Christian understanding of education also must include a constructive approach to failures, disabilities, and suffering, as it is informed by the theology of the cross. Similarly, the Christian mission entails an obligation for peace education and interreligious education, while our care for God's creation demands a spiritual dimension to ecological education.

Summary: Jarmila Geisler

3. The Concept of Education in Islam
(Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Zekirija Sejdini, University of Vienna)

As the Islamic understanding of human beings as having a central role in creation gives us a special responsibility for the world, human beings are called upon to educate themselves according to their own ideas in order to cultivate a way of dealing with the world and themselves. The three main Arabic terms for "education" used in Islamic scholarship are *taʿlīm* (knowledge imparted through instruction), *tarbiya* (a state of ethical/spiritual nurturing), and *taʾdīb* (sound social behaviour). The Qurʾān and *sunna* form both the framework and basis for education in Islam. The Qurʾān stresses the importance of learning, starting with its earliest verses which begin with the word "*iqraʾ* (read!)" and describe God as one who teaches. A number of *ḥadīth* traditions also encourage the seeking of knowledge (*ʿilm*). The question of whether *ʿilm*, in this context, refers to all knowledge or is restricted to religious learning is one that has been much debated by Muslim scholars. Many famous medieval Islamic thinkers,

such as al-Jāḥiẓ, ibn Saḥnūn, al-Fārābī, al-Ghazālī, and ibn Rushd, were not only educators in their fields, but have also produced important writings about education as such.

The historical development of Muslim education begins in the lifetime of Muḥammad, when the first educational institutions were founded in Medina. Important institutions were the mosque, the *kuttāb* (for elementary education), and the *madrasa* (for higher education). The Ottoman educational reforms of the 18th and 19th centuries had consequences that are still felt in the present. The educational reforms of the 19th and 20th centuries cannot be separated from the more general Islamic reform movements of the time. Reforms to an outdated education system were seen by many reformers as a necessary part of catching up with the West in terms of culture and science and resisting colonialism. More recently, the work of Prof. Fazlur Rahman has been instrumental in developing a modern Islamic concept of education. The development of Islamic education in Europe in cooperation with Christian institutions has also presented new ideas and challenges. Interreligious cooperation is also necessary to promote peaceful coexistence in pluralistic societies, which needs to be reflected in religious education.   Summary: Jarmila Geisler

4. Concluding Discussion

The three presentations encouraged stimulating discussions. One common theme in these debates was the relation of religious education to religious concepts of education in general, as realized for example in faith-based schools. These differ greatly in their self-concept and their effects on students, although there is a broad tendency for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to do better in faith-based schools, as their material needs are better provided for by the school than is often the case in other schools. From an Islamic perspective, the conceptual separation between religious education and education in general is a very recent phenomenon. The establishment of Islamic religious education in Western institutions such as in German schools and universities, for example, is likely to yield new concepts. The Islamic world is, of course, not the only context in which there have been extensive modern changes to the understanding of education. Examples for these changes reach from the reaction to colonial history in the Islamic world to the discussion about the influence of the churches on education in Germany. With regard to interreligious aspects, it was stated that interreligious cooperation within religious education is necessary to promote a peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society. Questions of common roots and the explanation of differing traditions can be promising. Still, each monotheistic religion has to justify its pluralistic attitude within religious education and to find out in what way this can contribute to interreligious understanding. Regarding the contemporary pluralistic society these questions will have ongoing relevance.

II. The Concept of Family

1. The Concept of Family in Judaism
(Prof. Dr. Michael S. Berger, Emory College of Arts and Sciences)

Michael Berger initiated his lecture with the thesis: In Judaism, the concept of family is deeply intertwined with the concept of "nation". Nation is perceived as extended family, that is characterized by a distinctive, shared identity. It implies the mutual assumption of responsibility. The joint ancestry and history are as important as the strong collectivist understanding, that supersedes the needs of the individual. The smaller family can be understood as a microcosm of the nation. Therefore, the family always has an interest in the issues facing the nation and is needed to respond to them with seriousness. The concept of family in Judaism is influenced by the life as a minority within a larger host civilization. This thesis, Berger then illustrated by describing the developments from the Second Temple period to modern Judaism.

In the period of the Second Temple Jews lived as Jehudim mainly in the province Jehud. Their life was characterized by a strong sense of clans, what resulted from the life in Babylonian Exile. A natural type of Judaic communities, which perceived Jewish ethnic bonds, can be distinguished from an intentional type, which saw itself as living an ideal form of authentic Jewish life. After the destruction of the temple there were two major developments, which can be identified among those, who endorsed the Rabbinic understanding: 1) The realization that there would be no Jewish nation as organized institution in the near future, and 2) the possibility of a future of the Jewish nation could only be attained by the commitment to halakhic observance and Torah study. Therefore, the Rabbis distinguished a natural family, that was responsible for the organic continuity of the people through marriage and procreation, from a covenantal family, that observed the covenant and should be supported by the natural family (for the Talmudic discourse see for example BT Yevamot 62b and 63). With the spreading of the Jewish communities from the Near East to Europe in the post-Talmudic period, Jewish life was mostly condensed into the local Jewish community. The concept of family thus evolved. The communal structure, *kehillah*, was of rising importance in the Middle Ages, since it took care of the ritual, educational, social and economic needs of its members. The local Jewish community mostly came to be like a family, being excluded from the non-Jewish society, depending on each other's support and often marrying among each other. Anti-Semitic riots in Eastern Europe then led to a movement to re-establish a national homeland for Jewish people.

Zionism had a "natural" understanding of nation, in contrast to the biblical "covenantal" one. The family's task to socialize its members into a particular national or cultural identity was shared with the collectivity known as *kibbutz* which then took over to complete control in socializing the youth. For the pioneers the *kibbutz* came to be the microcosm of the nation, not the family. This has changed over the last 60 years: nuclear families in the *kibbutz* remain intact and communal living is reserved for economic life.

In the past-half century, non-Orthodox Judaism has become increasingly diverse, whereas the Orthodox and especially the ultra-Orthodox have largely created a sub-society, mostly in America and Israel. Here, the concept of family is characterized by a pre-modern understanding and central to their worldview. Referring to the losses in the Holocaust the family is understood as important for national perpetuation, both in a natural and in a covenantal sense. Currently, most Jews live in Israel and America. It remains to be seen how future developments within American and Israeli society and among American and Israeli Jews will influence the understanding of the concept of "family" in Judaism.

<div align="right">Summary: Valerie Jandeisek</div>

2. The Concept of Family in Christianity
(Prof. Dr. theol. Dr. rer. soc. Jochen Sautermeister, University of Bonn)

To define the concept of family from a Christian point of view it is necessary to ask what is constitutive for Christian identity as well as confessional identity. Accordingly, preliminary to outlining the concept of family in Christianity is the question, whether marriage is understood as a sacrament. Jochen Sautermeister pointed out that the Catholic Church understands marriage as a sacrament and as the starting point of family. Thus, marriage is essential for the concept of family, which has to be considered in the context of the sacrament of marriage. Family can be defined as an intergenerational community.

The smallest member is the father, mother or the (adopted) child. It is not an economic community, but community of life and therein referring to God, who is the Creator of life. It is characterized by its personal intimacy and caring solidarity, not by competition. Referring to John 10:10, Sautermeister defined the promise of Jesus to give life abundantly as having a share in life and making new life. This process is repeated at all times. Therefore, family becomes an illustration of the community of Christ, both are characterized by unconditional acceptance. Consequently, family can be understood as *miniatola*, as little church. According to Catholic teaching, marriage is the realization of the sign of love of Christ towards his church. As covenant of personal love marriage is directed to offspring. Family morality derives from marriage morality. In contrast to the Catholic Church, protestant churches don't apprehend marriage as sacrament since there is no biblical evidence. There is no obligation to start a family or to be open towards family. But also, children are to be raised in the awareness of their sonship of God. Current transformations in society emphasize family as ethical form of life, which underlines responsible living in partnership, marriage and family.

<div align="right">Summary: Valerie Jandeisek</div>

3. The Concept of Family in Islam
(Dr. Pascal Held, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

Families in pre-Islamic Arabia were integrated into larger tribal or clan structures. Temporary marriages and polygamy were common, as was infanticide, particularly of girls. With the rise of Islam, family was centered around a patriarchal marriage with men as "caretakers" of

women (Q 4:34), though wives were given certain economic rights guaranteed through the dowry, marriage being seen as a contract. Divorce was possible and occurred in several different forms. Polygamy was not forbidden, but restricted. In the medieval period, monogamy was the most common because the duty to maintain the wives' standard of living made polygyny expensive for the husband and polygamy was seen critically by many scholars. It was permitted to have concubines, however, if a slave had a child by her master, she gained her freedom and the child had to be legitimised.

In addition to the differences in family law between Sunnī and Shīʿī Islam, most notably the acceptance of temporary marriage in Shīʿite law, there were also some differences between the Sunnī legal schools, for example on the issue of the woman's consent to marriage, which was absolutely required in the Ḥanafī school. In comparison to Christianity, Islam is often seen as more "sex-positive", as sexuality is not rejected inherently and sensuality is emphasized in Islamic literature; however, it is still regarded primarily as for the purpose of reproduction. Celibacy was frowned upon for this reason. In the Ottoman empire, marriages and divorces are better documented as a result of women's increased access to courts. A common stipulation in marriage contracts was to rule out polygamy. Despite some shifts in family and gender dynamics in the modern period, a patriarchal family structure is still assumed in most cases. There is a tension in contemporary debates between the role of *sharīʿa* as a bastion of conservatism and the historical flexibility of Islamic law.   Summary: Jarmila Geisler

4. Concluding Discussion

One repeated topic of discussion was the relationship of parents and children and how it is regulated in religious texts, with e.g. the Qur'ān mandating care for children but also for aging parents. Islam also places a high importance on procreation, placing it at odds with Christian ideals of celibacy of priests. This led to a discussion of the compatibility of modern social attitudes and church doctrine. The changing attitude of Western society towards e.g. homosexuality poses a challenge for Christian churches by provoking a reconsideration of its attitude. It was stated, for the Catholic Church a decade is not much time when compared to the time of its existence, whereas it is a long time for a sole human being. This differing perception of time is on the one hand a reason for the slow change of church tradition, on the other hand an aspect of today's criticism of the church. Also, the contemporary understanding of divorce was discussed. The promise given in marriage exceeds human power, since nobody can guarantee for what might happen in life and it goes beyond one's own control. Therefore, the promise can be understood as a figure of hope that marriage hopefully will sustain. Another frequent theme was the relation between the nuclear family and broader social relationships. Muḥammad's early preaching about the *umma*, for instance, can be seen as a replacement structure for the clan structure of pre-Islamic Arab society, recalling the close connection between the concepts of family and of nation that was mentioned in Prof. Berger's presentation on Judaism. Moreover, family units are of course interconnected with each other and larger social structures. Also discussed was the idea of God the creator as a father to His creation, which plays a role in Judaism and Christianity. There, a familial metaphor is used to illustrate God's relationship to humanity.