


Penetrating xenophobic remoteness in interreligious encounters: Toward a pastoral praxis of befriending neighbouring in 'pavement caregiving' and 'streetwise compassion'



Author:

Daniël J. Louw¹ 

Affiliation:

¹Department of Practical Theology, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Daniël Louw,
djl@sun.ac.za

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Meeting the foreign and strange other should be viewed as a natural and inevitable feature of everyday life. When the other is endangering one's comfort zones, especially in cases of 'bread-and-butter' questions, xenophobic fear sets in. Furthermore, when resistance is fuelled by fanatic expressions of religious self-maintenance or racial polarisation, xenophobic remoteness contributes to modes of discriminating suspicion, resistance of the strange other, even violent behaviour and forms of schismatic enmity. The concept of 'befriending neighbouring', based on the notion of compassionate being-with, could contribute to informal forms of friendship, the cornerstone for establishing 'social coherence'. Thus, the question: How can convictions regarding the spiritual meaning of life and the content of religious belief systems, inspire faithful people to build bridges to one another within the normal circumstances of life? This article is a critical reflection on some of the basic presuppositions in some of the main religions and other philosophies of life, concerning the notion of compassion in caring for the strange other and the establishing of a more humane approach to the dynamics of everyday life.

Contribution: Pastoral caregiving as a form of community care, should be directed by a praxis of befriending habitus and neighbourly outreach (pavement caregiving) within public spaces of voluntary, compassionate being-with the foreign other (streetwise compassion), in order to overcome discriminating forms of xenophobic remoteness.

Keywords: befriending neighbouring; misericordia (compassionate being-with); pavement caregiving; streetwise compassion; xenophobic fear.

Introduction

Most of times, the foreign other threatens our comfort zones, fuelling violence and destabilising harmonious relationships in public life. One dare to say that merely the fact of otherness, automatically creates a sense of uncertainty, distance and remoteness. When the other threatens one's cultural customs and religious boundaries, whether framed by social status, financial wealth, racial prejudices, biased gender roles, traditional rituals, the notion of xenophobic fear comes into play. According to a news report (Powell 2017), people in township neighbourhoods are scared and forced into defensive forms of silence:

[F]oreign shopkeepers say they are regularly targeted because of their nationality. One, Fatuma Hassan, said she has taken to wearing a face-covering *niqab* so that she can speak freely about the threats she faces.

Xenophobia is indeed a complex phenomenon: multi-factorial and multi-dimensional. Besides religious factors, as in many cases of the migrant crisis in Europe, social and economic factors do play a decisive role. See the following: A xenophobic attack on a foreigner by a mob of inhabitants in Pretoria, South Africa, 24 February 2017. 'This type of xenophobic violence, analysts say, is largely driven by high unemployment, inequality and frustration with the government's failure to provide everyone with basic services' (Powell 2017). For academic purposes only.

For local communities, the foreign other is often a burden, penetrating scarce resources, making an appeal on public welfare, disturbing the economy, and becoming competitors in terms of jobs and opportunities for education. However, most of times, the foreign other is not merely the culturally other, but the religious other. And when religiosity is clothed in rigid doctrine and traditional belief systems, meeting the foreign other becomes virtually impossible. This is the reason why Bruce Reiler in his book, *Abraham: A journey to the heart of three faiths* (2002:1), poses the

intriguing question: 'Can the religions get along?' What have the three major religions in common to promote peaceful coexistence and interfaith communication?

Abrahamism: A key factor in the Jewish, Islamic and Christian faith tradition?

Reiler views Abraham as the first-ever interfaith portrait regarding God's caring intervention in the misery of our being human. As patriarch of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faith, Abraham is described as God's key partner in the establishment of hope for a more humane future. The great patriarch of the Hebrew Bible is also the spiritual forefather of the New Testament and the grand holy architect of the Koran. Abraham is the shared ancestor of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Understanding the narrative of Abraham and the offering of his son Isaac, opens views that bring Jesus, Mohammed and Moses together in a way that three religions can start to embrace one another. In this regard, Reiler (2002) argues that Jerusalem becomes the epitome of religious interrelatedness:

[T]he relationship between a person and another human being is what creates and allows for a relationship with God. If you're not capable of living with each other and getting along with each other, then you're not capable of having a relationship with God. (p. 5)

'Abrahamism' (Reiler 2002:46) is about the willingness to risk and to sacrifice. The bottom line is, if you are too comfortable, too secure, or too into having control, then you won't be willing to start trusting the other, neither the religious sources of your faith tradition. Religious encounters therefore become juxtaposed.

Interreligious encounters

At stake in interreligious encounters is more than merely the content of faith. Interreligious encounters bring about questions regarding the spiritual realm, meaning and purposefulness of life. In one way or another, it deals with the transcendent realm of life and connections to the God-factor in human events.



Source: Powell, A., 2017, 'Foreigners in South Africa: Xenophobic attacks a daily danger', Africa, 24 May, viewed 12 October 2021, from <https://www.voanews.com/a/foreigners-in-south-africa-say-xenophobic-attacks-a-daily-danger/3868927.html>

Note: Xenophobia is indeed a complex phenomenon and multi-factorial and multi-dimensional. Besides religious factors, as in many cases of the migrant crisis in Europe, social and economic factors do play a decisive role.

FIGURE 1: A xenophobic attack on a foreigner by a mob of inhabitants in Pretoria, South Africa, 24 February 2017.

According to Reiler (2002:5), the core question in interreligious encounters and interfaith dialoguing is not whether God can bring harmony and peace, but whether believers can (Reiler 2002:5). Why not? What are the stumbling blocks? If religions can indeed play a pivotable role in crossing over and overcoming xenophobic resistance and remoteness, what are the possible directives for authentic interreligious dialoguing and a fruitful praxis of interreligious cooperation?

The complexity of interreligious encounters and hypothesis

Interreligious encounters and dialoguing with the foreign other are tough and complex. The notion of the 'only truth' in doctrine and confessions creates a huge stumbling block and often leads to intolerable forms of religious blaming. To overcome different forms of religious intolerance and xenophobic fear, it is imperative to find a kind of common ground, which creates space for meaningful conversing. Thus, the basic hypothesis, namely the overcoming of xenophobic remoteness, should be directed by a praxis of befriending and neighbourly outreach. It should exhibit trustworthiness and warm hospitality. Befriending neighbouring should start where people 'see' and 'meet' one another within the ordinary and casual happenings of life: on the street, the pavement, and within neighbourhoods. To say 'hallo' to the stranger, is a form of streetwise 'gossiping the gospel'.

Furthermore, the skill of empathetic listening and the habitual condition of compassionate being-with the other, create a kind of common ground to revitalise a public square (Admirand 2019:13) wherein meaningful connections of 'crossing over' and deeper, humbler and humane forms of meaningful conversations could be facilitated.

At the intersection of 'crossing over', interreligious encounters should try to foster safe spaces of co-humanity within the public sphere of what can be called the 'marketplace' of humane intersections. It is in this regard that the notion of befriending neighbouring opens new opportunities for public forms of pavement caregiving and streetwise compassion.

The core pastoral question within these public spaces of humane encounters is the following: What role could religions play to overcome xenophobic remoteness and hostile estrangement? How can pastoral caregiving be reframed to explore and mine the healing potential of non-professional people (volunteers) in the fostering of a public day-to-day caregiving to one another – the volunteering healing of life?

Befriending neighbouring: A grassroots approach

Befriending neighbouring is about a basic kind of grassroots and streetwise display of kindness, grace, hospitality and compassion directed to the other unconditionally. Gabriel Opke (2021) says:

[F]riendliness is being open toward other people, taking the risk of inviting them into relationship with you. It means being curious, warm and inviting toward people you don't know well and letting yourself be vulnerable and interdependent with people you do. When we are friendly, our starting assumption is that others are well-intentioned and open to reciprocity, and that we can learn from them. This does not mean we are naively oblivious to the fact that generous assumptions may be wrong – and definitely will be at times. Rather, friendliness means that in the absence of evidence to the contrary we assume the best, and even when evidence is mixed, we tend to give people the benefit of the doubt. Because our expectations are often self-fulfilling, friendliness maximizes the richness of our relationships.

For Aristotle, friendliness is a basic virtue of social discourse that serves as springboard for all other virtues – the common thread that binds the tapestry of humanity together. Among the moral virtues considered by Aristotle, friendliness or amiability deals with our relationship to other people – friendship as reciprocated goodwill. He considers two extremes or vices related to friendliness: obsequiousness and disagreeableness (Aristotle 2021).

In terms of a praxis of befriending neighbouring, hospitable befriending means to be friendly to others (especially those who you do not care for). It represents the pastoral act of replacing yourself in the position of the other. Befriending is about the challenge to see your own self in the face of the foreign other.

Furthermore, the art of friendliness is to look for and recognise the things that you have in common with others. This is where the habitus of compassionate being-with the other comes into play. The challenge in befriending is to promote our shared humanity, and to address our existential quest for meaning and dignity. Fundamentally, it is about both the preventing and overcoming of destructive, stigmatic forms of xenophobic fear.

Fearing the religious other in interreligious discourses

In the publication, *Key concepts in interreligious discourses* (Tamer 2021), the series intend to establish an 'archaeology of religious knowledge'. This can enable a new understanding of religious concepts as evolving products of living discourses that emerge under diverse historical, cultural and religious circumstances (Tamer 2021). With reference to some of the main religious traditions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam), the intention in the first volume is to address obstacles like violence and hostile prejudice in order to establish peace and meaningful encounters. The following challenge has been formulated: To link religious terminology like 'love' and 'mercy' of God (transcendent divine ideals) to earthly and human relationships, in the attempt to overcome natural resistance (Tamer 2021). This challenge is aptly captured by Admirand (2019:6): 'To understand another religion or ideology one must try to experience it from within, which requires a "passing over," even if only momentarily, into

another's religious or ideological experience.' This could become a very challenging endeavour indeed, especially under circumstances wherein one is convinced that the other's way of life or views are faulty or threatening.

According to Admirand (2019:6), empathy coupled with humility is a crucial step in reminding us of the mirroring humanity of the other, and so the need to address one another with respect, sincerity and trust. The overall goal in interfaith and interreligious dialogue in all its various manifestations and levels is to promote what has become increasingly overlooked – the value of extended face-to-face interactions that promote honesty and sincerity based on a sense of compassionate care, including empathetic listening, mutual learning, and moral development (Admirand 2019:11).

Most of times, face-to-face encounters take place where strangers meet one another by passing by on pavements and the other becomes a face (*visage*) (Levinas 1974:125). According to Levinas, meeting the strange other creates a movement, instigated by a kind of metaphysical desire (*désir métaphysique*). The result is that I am immediately moulded into a responsibility, that leads to a vocation of hospitable welcoming.

A personal case: Experiencing 'Grüss Gott'¹ – the blessing of *sjalôm* as exposition of streetwise compassion

Meeting the other is an invitation for the mutuality of a blessing and an offering of peace. The traditional greeting among Jews is *shalom aleichem* [*peace unto you*], to which the response is *aleichem shalom* [*to you, peace*]. To my mind, this is what pavement caregiving and streetwise wisdom are about. The offering of mutual peace heals both the giver and the receiver.

My first encounter with 'streetwise counselling' and 'pavement healing' was when I arrived in 1970 in Tübingen as total stranger, excluded from the German customs. While standing on the pavement with my luggage, not knowing what to do, I approached a young lad who greeted me very friendly with: *Grüss Gott* [*God encounters you with a blessing*]. *Grüss Gott* is then more or less a variant of the Hebrew blessing *sjalôm* that converts daily encounters into sacred spaces of grace and events of soulful healing. Albeit he offered me help although he was on his way to the hospitable where his wife was in labour with their first child. He took me and my wife to a pension in a nearby small village with his old Volkswagen and contacted us later to make sure whether we were safe. We became friends for life, due to pavement caregiving and streetwise hospitality.

¹ *Grüss Gott* is the shortened form of both *Grüße dich Gott* and its plural *Grüße euch Gott*. The verb *grüßen* originally had a meaning like *segnen*, although it now means to greet. The essential meaning of *grüss Gott* is therefore 'God bless you'. Such a religious expression in a greeting only exists in a few countries. For example, people wish one another a simple 'good day' in Poland, Spain, and Portugal, while in Gaelic-speaking Ireland, the popular greeting is *Dia dhuit*, like the English *goodbye*, a contraction of 'God be with ye' (GRÜß GOTT 2021).

The case illustrates how the other can become a 'streetwise host' that frees the human 'I' from his or her fear for exclusion and loneliness. On a more philosophical and existential level, one could say that the other play a pivotal role to penetrate the often-solipsistic existence of the human 'I'. In fact, while meeting the other within the everyday happenings of life, the other cracks the loneliness or even insufficiency of the 'I' (Levinas 1987:44). The other could even save the 'I' from demeaning forms of egoism and destructive estrangement. The other creates the miracle and wonder of stepping out of oneself to embrace and not to destroy. In this sense, both the other as well as the unique 'I' become hospitable hosts to one another, exercising volunteer caregiving.

From formal caregiving to informal caregiving (volunteer caregiving)

Caregiving has become so 'professional' and 'formalised' that the caring capacity lurking in day-to-day human encounters can easily become overlooked. It is in this regard, that the notion of 'befriending' and 'neighbouring' should be revisited as source for caregiving. Caregiving then, understood as the inherent empathetic capacity and 'natural pathos' to reach out to the need of the suffering other, even though the other is to a large extent most of times the underdog, the stranger, the outcast, the criminal, the poor and the lonely.

Informal caregiving – a feature of life

One can say that in the normal happenings of life, care and compassion are existential features of life. The ultimate of life is captured by the notion of nurture and compassionate care – *die Sorge* (Bloch 1968:249). Since our being human is exposed to the threat of nothingness and dread, fellow human beings are always making an appeal to our attention, interest, concern, compassion, companionship and care. To care for the other and to assist the other to cope with the demands of life, could be rendered as a feature of meaningful living.

To be exposed to dread and the overwhelming existential awareness that everything could eventually become in vain, raise the question of meaningfulness in life. According to Heidegger (1963:325), the core problem in caregiving (*Sorge*) is the focus on the other as connected to the question about future and a sense of purposefulness. For Heidegger, meaning is a sense of purposefulness (direction towards – *Worauhin*) (Heidegger 1963:324), that is, the teleological structuredness of being. It is in this sense that the basic existential need in the human quest for meaning is purposefulness, compassionate caring and befriending acknowledgement. To overcome dread and the fear for nothingness, humans need a sense of belongingness and humane forms of acknowledgement; thus, the need for companionship and befriending acceptance as cornerstones for the fostering of a praxis of *volunteer caregiving*.

Within the context of voluntary caregiving, befriending is often conceptualised and practiced as a marked alternative to staff-delivered professional care (i.e. the placebo in clinical

settings) where volunteers provide compassionate social support and companion resources to meet the care needs of the befriender (Siette, Cassidy & Priebe 2017:1). It functions as a kind of 'bridging the gap' (Burn et al. 2020) between the foreign, lonely other and the capacity of emphatic concern lurking in the dynamics between I and Thou (Buber 1965).

The primacy of the strange and lonely other: Befriending sociation

The term *befriending* was initially introduced in the 16th century and was known as a process of acting as a friend to people in need. The intention was to help, favour, to assist and promote human dignity. Siette et al. (2017) explain:

[T]his humanistic purpose later evolved into a formal befriending programme for suicidal crisis in 1962 which redefined befriending as the provision of 'companionship and support of a friend to (a client) especially in a lay capacity'. The practice of befriending has been largely adopted by the voluntary sector, with over 3 500 schemes existing in the UK alone, where volunteers support a range of populations including individuals with mental illness or dementia, suffering from bereavement, requiring refuge and suicide prevention. (p. 1)

In terms of befriending sociation, the isolated individual, the lonely other, has primacy in order of analysis and an ethos of compassionate care, sacrificial love and an attitude of hospitable outreach to the other. 'The isolated individual gains meaning not from her positive existence but from relation to the missing others' (Simmel in Buckman 2018:4). As Buckman (2018:4) points out, isolation presupposes society, the fundamental form of sociation is the dyad (*Zweierverbindung*), the cleaving of the one to the other. One can say that intimacy, friendship, attentiveness to the specific rather than the universal is the hallmark of true and authentic companionship. Companionship then, not as merely a professional stance, but as expression of hospitable being-with the other – a feature of becoming both host and guest towards one another.

'Befriending offers supportive, reliable relationships through volunteer befrienders to people who would otherwise be socially isolated' (Barran 2021). It also offers companionship, transcending exclusive foreclosure. 'Befriending provides companionship for isolated people, the chance to develop a new relationship, and opportunities to participate in social activities' (Dean & Goodlad 1998).

Befriending presupposes the other not in the first place as threat or opponent, but as challenge to grow into authenticity and integrity. In this sense, the other is an invitation to meaningful coexistence and ontic ingredient of co-humanity. Levinas (1969) further writes:

The Other is not initially a fact, is not an obstacle, does not threaten me with death; he is desired in my shame ... And if the other can invest me and invest my freedom, of itself arbitrary, this is in the last analysis because I can feel myself to be the other of the other. (p. 84)

Therefore, the other establishes an asymmetrical relationship, which refrains from turning the other into a second version of the self. The other invites the 'I' into language, conversing, communication, community, encounter, communion and companionship. The other intrudes selfish solipsism and functions as a crack into superfluous and artificial forms of destructive self-maintenance (Levinas 1987:44). Due to the principle of reciprocity and mutuality, befriending companionship motivates strangers to move from static modes of coexistence to caring modes of mutual codetermination.

The foreign and strange other: Paradoxical remoteness-in-proximity

In dealing with the otherness of the other, Emmanuel Levinas (1987:44) views the strange and foreign other as 'crack' in the totality of closed interactional systems. To a large extent, all forms of human encounter, social interaction and relational interconnectedness is structured by what can be called the strange otherness of the other (particularity and distinctive identity). Buckman (2018) postulates:

One becomes a stranger by inducing a feeling of strangeness, an awareness of her distance, her not-belonging to the unity of the social structure. One might say that the stranger escapes reduction to the social totality. But she does not entirely escape; we understand her as bearing general characteristics common to humanity as a whole. (pp. 2-3)

As George Simmel (in Buckman 2018:3) aptly pointed out: 'The stranger holds a dedicated place of otherness within the social structure, an "inorganically appended" element which nevertheless counts as an "organic member".' The stranger represents the inevitable paradox of proximity and remoteness. In meeting the foreign other, distance within this relation indicates that one who is close by is remote, but his or her strangeness indicates 'that one who is remote is near' (Simmel in Buckman 2018:3).

According to Levinas, 'I' meet the stranger face to face (*visage*), an embodied presence requiring attention and care. At the same time, the distance to the stranger is unbridgeable, because the stranger is not fully available in the way most beings are: 'He is not wholly in my site' (Levinas 1969:39). Buckman (2018) formulates this as follows:

[T]he remoteness of the stranger frustrates my power, my ability to control the things at my disposal, which the stranger manages to escape. The stranger as a social figure typifies the transcendent other – the other of metaphysical desire. (p. 3)

The other breaks through forms and becomes the object of the 'I', creating a pure hole in the world. Without any form, the other is the nude, the stranger, the orphan, the widow (Rheinboth 2016:3). As the outsider and outcast, the other can even be my opponent and enemy.

How could pastoral care fill the gap created by the otherness of the strange other?

Crossing over' in interreligious encounters: A challenge to the pastoral art of *misericordia*

Very aptly, Schipani and Bueckert (2009) capture the gist and challenge of intercultural and interreligious encounters within the dynamics of establishing interrelational connections at the intersection of crossing crossroads:

[M]oral character that integrates a plurality of attitudes and virtues such as: capacity for wonder and respect in the face of the stranger; sensitivity and receptivity; courage to risk and to be surprised; freedom to be vulnerable and open to learning and growth; disposition to recognize, accept, and honor those deemed to be different; hospitality grounded in compassion, humility, and generosity; passion to care and creative energy to transform the inherent violence of separation, prejudice, and the alienation into a way of being with (empathy) and for (sympathy) the other as neighbor and partner in care and healing. (p. 317)

The Christian poet Lactantius Placidus (AD c.350–c.400) (in Davies 2001), who lived from the 3rd to the 4th century, combined the concept of compassion, *misericordia*, to the notion of *humanitas*. He viewed compassion as a corporate strength granted by God (*hunc pietatis affectum*) in order that humankind can show kindness, grace to others, love them, and cherish them, protecting them from all dangers and coming to their aid (Lactantius in Davies 2001:35). Compassion thus creates a bond of human society and displays human dignity. '*Humanitas* is to be displayed to those who are "suitable" and "unsuitable" alike, and "this is done humanely (humane) when it is done without hope on reward"' (Lactantius in Davies 2001:35).

According to Martha Nussbaum (in Davies 2001:238), pitiful compassion should be preferred in order to express 'the basic social emotion', connecting both the cognitive and the affective. For Nussbaum, compassion is in fact a certain kind of reasoning, a certain kind of thought about the well-being of others common to caregiving engagements based on religious convictions. This focus on the well-being of the other in order to express the *misericordia* of compassionate-being with the other should be accompanied by what David Augsburger (1986) calls *interpathy*.

Towards a praxis of *misericordia* in streetwise caregiving: The contribution of different spiritual and religious traditions

In the following exposition, I want to point out how several examples of a spirituality of compassion (*misericordia*) in different religious and philosophical traditions contribute to a sense of interconnectivity and belongingness despite cultural and religious diversity. Firstly, a Christian approach, as exemplified by the reformer Johan Calvin, then a Muslim, Buddhist, and Hinduist approach. In the last instance, I will deal with a Hebrew and Jewish perspective as background to a New Testament perspective and Christological interpretation.

- Befriending as praxis principle of 'neighbourly love' (Calvinistic ethics)

The reformer John Calvin's incentives to restructure social life in Geneva, can be viewed as a kind of a very early mode of public theology, and example of cultural intersection and interreligious interconnectivity. The way in which he linked the diaconate with *cura pauperum*, the apostolic responsibility of caring for the poor (McGrath 1993:80), laid the foundation for a grassroots- and community-based public of compassionate and befriending caring.

For Calvin, the core issue in Christian hermeneutics was the fundamental difference between Stoic impassibility (iron philosophy, wisdom of the mind) and Christian pathos (*sapientia* – wisdom of the heart).

[B]ut we have nothing to do with that iron philosophy which our Lord and Master condemned – not only in word, but also in example. For he both grieved and shed tears for his own and other's woes. (Calvin 1949 Book 111, chap. V111: 21 – 22)

In a sermon on Deuteronomy, Calvin addresses the issue of being a stranger (Busch 2007:74). According to Calvin (in Busch 2007:74), '... we must live together in a family of brothers and sisters which Christ has founded in his blood; and with very hostility he gives the opportunity to resist hostility'.

Fundamentally, in his view on the equal value of human beings, Calvin operated from the perspective of 'neighbourly love' as a foundational principal for an inclusive approach to social and human issues. It also plays a fundamental role in acts of compassionate caring as Calvin (1854) explains:

[T]he word neighbour includes all men living; for we are linked together by a common nature ... The image of God ought to be particularly regarded as a sacred bond of union, but, for that very reason, no distinction is here made between friend and foe, nor can the wickedness of men set aside the right of nature. (p. 116)

In Calvin's sermon on Galatians 6:9–11 (quoted by Busch 2007), it is evident that the outsider, stranger and other, function as a kind of mirror and looking glass for a community and caring based church:

We cannot but behold our own face as it were in a glass in the person that is poor and despised ... though he were the furthest stranger in the world. Let a Moor or a barbarian come among us, and yet inasmuch as he is a human, he brings with him a looking glass wherein we may see that he is our brother and our neighbour. (p. 75)

According to Busch (2007:75), this concrete spiritual insight of Calvin is the source of his interest in social and economic affairs. The command for neighbourly love is the thrust of Calvin's 'spiritual humanism' [*author's interpretation*]. This fundamental ethic principle could be viewed as the cornerstone for interfaith dialoguing in order to move from an exclusive to an inclusive approach in encountering the other as stranger and as being different.

- Befriending as exponent of loving for one's brother (*al yuhibba li-akhî-hi*) what one loves for oneself (Muslim tradition)

With reference to commonalities between different religious belief systems, the Qur'an emphasises love towards God as a primary demand. However, it does not exclude love for the 'brother'. The commandment: 'love for your brother what you love for yourself' in the Muslim tradition is the common expression of the golden rule of love, and is fundamental to authentic faith and religiosity. The Qur'an (49:10) itself clearly states that 'believers are naught else than brothers', and that 'He made friendship between your hearts so that ye became as brothers by His grace' (Qur'an, 3:102–103; in Sunni & Shiite scholars 2018).

One can therefore conclude and say: 'Whereas Christian doctrine prescribes loving thy neighbour like thyself, Muslim doctrine prescribes loving for one's brother (*al yuhibba li-akhî-hi*) what one loves for oneself' (Sunni & Shiite scholars 2018). This love for the brother is even in Islam not merely focused on the person belonging to the same religious group. On grassroots level in disadvantaged communities, people's exposure to a common threat (as in the case of the apartheid policy in South Africa) brought about surprising modes of coexistence, based on the principles of befriending and neighbourly co-humanity. In this regard, a Christian (Flori Schikker) and a Muslim (Koelsoem Kamalie), living together in the apartheid township of Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, South Africa, exemplify the praxis principle and common ground of neighbourly love, befriending companionship and mutual caregiving.

The two ladies, one a Christian (Florence 'Flori' Schikker) and the other Muslim (Aunty Kulsam Kamalie), were neighbours over a very long period in Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, South Africa. They became close friends, visiting and dining together. They became iconic, exemplifying what cross-cultural encounters and interfaith dialoguing imply. They had several interviews over the radio and television, and published a cooking book together. Aunty Koelie and her friend, Florence Flori Schikker released their first cookbook together in March 2016, called *Kook saam Kaaps*,



Source: Florrie & Kulsam, 2020, Title of programme, viewed 19 December 2020, from <https://www.dailyvoice.co.za/news/rest-in-peace-aunty-koelie-46670676>

FIGURE 2: A Christian and Muslim, exercising befriending neighbourhoodship as overcoming cultural and religious schisms and social prejudice.

which was a firm favourite with the *Daily Voice's* recipe column, *Cooksisters*.

The following quotation proves the point:

Aunty Koelie and Flori rose to fame when they shared their *huiskos* recipes and accompanying stories from their mothers and oumas on Radio Sonder Grense (RSG) radio's afternoon show, *Tjailatyd*.

Their cooking show, *Flori en Koelsoem se kosse* on the VIA channel on DStv, was produced by Leroux Botha and Nina Swart, and ran over two seasons in 2016 and 2017. Soraya Salie from the Bonteheuwel *Walking BusLadies*, says Aunty Koelie was loved by all.

[M]ay Allah grant *sabr* and contentment in the heart of her husband Boeta Oesman, and the hearts of her siblings, families and friends as well as her cooking partner, Aunty Flori.

Although they respect fundamental religious differences, they establish a praxis of compassion and care. And very surprisingly, cooking together create a safe space of co-humanity and authentic coexistence. 'Together they have put Bonteheuwel on the map nationally and internationally for working together in diversity' (Florrie & Kulsam 2020).

- Befriending as spiritual default (The *bodhisattva* path and existential ethos of selflessness in Buddhism)

The statement that love for the other and compassionate caring are default characteristics of authentic religious encounters and spiritual-philosophical contemplation is also applicable to the spiritual default of Buddhism.

In an article, *Compassion in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions*, Jayaram (2019) points out that the idea of compassion is an important aspect of Buddhist ethics and monastic discipline. Just as the idea of nonviolence, it is deeply embedded in the essential doctrine of the Buddhist Dharma, the Four Noble Truth and the Eightfold Path. The Buddha practiced it and encouraged its practice for building the nobility of the character and cultivate loving kindness. Buddhism identifies it as 'one of the highest virtues which one has to cultivate on the path to Nirvana'.

The so-called *bodhisattva path* is about selflessness, wisdom and compassion as explained by Trinlae (2017); therefore, the main theme of spiritual care in Buddhism is the process of becoming:

[C]ompletely open, to have that kind of absolute trust in yourself (which) is the real meaning of compassion and love ... one must accept the whole situation of life as it is, both the light and the dark, the good and the bad. One must open oneself to life, communicate with it. (p. 93)

The identification of key constructs in caregiving by Trinlae (2017:178), illustrates how she as a devoted Buddhist, experiences the contribution of Buddhist thinking to the praxis of compassionate care. Buddhist spirituality should therefore contribute to a sense of hospitable being-with (on becoming

home). In Tibetan Buddhism, the virtue of compassion is even taken to a new height by the practice of not only wishing the well-being of the suffering souls (compassion is not merely an affect or emotional impulse), but also transferring one's own good karma to them as an ultimate sacrifice (compassion as an ontic feature of a spiritual devotion).

In this sense, a Buddhist understanding of compassion links the spiritual realm of transcendence to experiences of emotional well-being. The undergirding argument here is that transcendence enables a kind of purifying self-concept that is open to compassionate actions of outreach to others versus an isolating space of self-ness. Compassion promotes human well-being.

- Befriending as ethos and mode of purifying being (The concept of *karuṇā* [compassion] in Hinduism)

It becomes clear that the notion of human well-being and human welfare are central to transcendental contemplation; thus, the emphasis on compassion in several spiritual traditions. In Sanskrit, the equivalent of compassion is *karuṇā* (compassion is a fundamental quality in the *bodhisattva* ideal of Mahayana Buddhism) (Jayaram 2019). The concept of *karuṇā* is used in both Hinduism and Buddhism.

[T]herefore, it is natural to extend compassionate action or Karuna to everyone without distinction because we are all one. As we help others and aid them in their healing process, all beings benefit. Because of the oneness of all beings, it is understood that Karuna is not only extended to others out of love, but also because it is an entirely logical thing to do. In the same way that you would want to heal your own wounds, you would also want the wounds of others to heal. It is also stated in the Buddhist literature that Karuna must be accompanied by *parjna* or wisdom in order to have the right effect. (Karuna Reiki® 2021)

Karuṇā encompasses many different tones and modes of pathos. Several words can be used to express the rich magnitude of the concept: *anukampana* [sensitivity], *krpa* [grace], *daya* [mercy], *ghrṇa* [revulsion at the suffering of others] and *karpanya* [mellowness of heart]. Jayaram (2019) explains:

[E]ach word has its own specific meaning and used in different contexts. *Karuna* is a virtuous feeling which is generated in the mellowness of the heart. God is considered in Hinduism as a *karunamayi*, the very personification of compassion.

Compassion is in fact a way of life and a mode of being (*habitus*). 'The Buddha and Mahavira exemplified it in their personal conduct and considered it cultivation an essential part of attaining liberation' (Jayaram 2019). *Karuṇā* or compassion are related to the realm of ethos. As a higher virtue and the culmination of the practice of restraints and rules (*vyamas* and *niyammas*) and all other virtues on the spiritual path, compassion touches an ethics of sacrifice within the framework of high moral standards. Its presence is imperative to spiritual contemplation, enlightenment of the human mind. Its natural and spontaneous expression is the proof that one has overcome several mental, psychological and physical barriers, and impurities and advanced on the path of pious devotion. Furthermore, Jayaram (2019) explains:

[T]he virtue of compassion can be divided into three types, the pure, the impure and the dark according to the predominance of gunas namely Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. Only those in whom the mode of Sattva (purity) is predominantly present can show selfless, unhindered, sattvic compassion to one and all.

The purity of legitimate compassion is tested by severe modes of human suffering. They help those in suffering as part of their service and devotion to God; they play a healing function as true *Bhagavatas* or servants of God, and include love, kindness, sameness, non-violence, non-stealing, charity, selfless service, equanimity, discriminating intelligence (critical realism) and devotion. Compassion is about existential outpourings showing mercy (*daya*) to others and thus rendered as an important virtue and part of a householder's obligatory duty (Jayram 2019).

The value of compassion within a Hindu context can be summarised by the following quotation:

[K]aruna is the motivating quality of all enlightened beings who are working to end suffering on Earth. They continually send an unlimited amount of healing energy and guidance to us, but not all are receptive to it. As you develop Karuna in yourself, not only are you helping others, but you also become more receptive to the Karuna that is being sent by all enlightened beings. (Karuna Reiki® 2021)

Conclusion

To capture the gist of the argument thus far: Openness, inclusiveness, healing and human well-being rather than isolation, exclusiveness and estrangement are characteristics of 'true religion' and 'authentic spirituality'. In this regard, compassion and a hospitable focus on the need of the other could be rendered as one of the features of authentic human interaction and encounters. It also functions as a common denominator in many of the major religions.

Befriending neighbouring should be introduced in a pastoral caregiving to foster a praxis of voluntary caregiving. Pavement caregiving is about a grassroots approach wherein the natural capacity of human beings to care for one another (*Sorge*) is promoted. What is most needed is a kind of wisdom of the heart (*sapientia*) wherein people living together in local communities are motivated to reach out to one another irrespective of race, culture, gender or religion. It is in this regard that empathy and sympathy should become grounded by religious and spiritual sources that are based in the notion of *miser cordia*: Compassion as a corporate strength granted by spiritual and divine sources (*hunc pietatis adfectum*) in order that humankind can show kindness, grace to others, love them, and cherish them, protecting them from all dangers and coming to their aid (Lactantius in Davies 2001:35). Xenophobia should be overcome by xenophilia.

My argument regarding the befriending neighbouring can be aligned with the proposition of Leo Tolstoy, namely that in the ordinary details of daily existence, the actual everyday 'live' experience of individuals, the specific relation of

individuals to one another, creates a vivid reality that can be penetrated and healed by love (see Berlin 1996:27–29). 'Individuals can, by the use of their own resources, understand and control the course of events' (see Berlin on Tolstoy's thinking 1996:27).

Tolstoy (1982) captures the core meaning of xenophilia as exponent of befriending neighbouring in the following understanding of love, uttered by the dying Prince Andrei in *War and Peace*:

Yes – love (he reflected again, quite lucidly). But not that love which loves for something, to gain something or because of something, but the love a I knew for the first time when, dying, I saw my enemy and yet loved him. I experienced the love which is the very essence of the soul, the love which requires no object. ... To love one's neighbours, to love one's enemies, to love everything – to love God in all his manifestations. (p. 1090)

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Author's contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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