

Religious conflicts as a focal point of (in)tolerance

In addition, the volume takes a look at another source of conflict that has increasingly preoccupied the Western world at least since the beginning of the third millennium. The phenomenon of religion, at times ephemeral in the twentieth century, is pushing back with force into the public sphere, whether through the immigration of deeply religious people from other cultures who live their religion peacefully, or through the burgeoning of Islamism and terrorism.

The concept of peace that has dominated modern societies since the religious wars of the 16th century, namely the pushing back of religious beliefs from the public to the private sphere, is thus proving to be inadequate in the “post-secular” era. The “return of the gods”³ to the public sphere, however, is socially acceptable and in conformity with peace in pluralistic societies only if these are prepared to be tolerant. For this, neither the traditional concept of tolerance as toleration nor that of active tolerance in the sense of formal rules of conflict resolution is sufficient, but proactive tolerance is needed, which builds up spaces of trust through education and communication.

The systematic novelty of the concept of tolerance presented here is especially its theological dimension in the sense of “public theology”. So far, there is no scientifically founded elaboration on this dimension in the sense intended here. This is a considerable gap in research, since it is precisely the religious dimension that is once again at the heart of the challenge of tolerance today. For it must prove itself at the forefront in the clash of strong convictions, and thus also of religious worldviews and communities, i.e. in a discursive landscape electrified by the question of truth.

Proactive tolerance can transform the potentials inherent in the diversity of different convictions, mentalities and traditions from a supposed threat to truth and unity into a richness. It is precisely the proactive perspective, which takes the search for truth seriously and values convictions, that thus clearly differs from resignation to questions of truth or the pushing back of strong convictions and thus also of questions of faith into the merely private sphere. This is the point of the further development of the concept of tolerance into proactive tolerance, which is the basis of the volume presented here.

3 Graf 2007.