

European Network of Research on Religion, Spirituality and Health

Newsletter 2023-1

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Editorial

Dear colleagues, dear friends

Another busy year is coming to its end and we are looking back on several highlights. The first one is our European Conference in Amsterdam opening the opportunity to gather again after two years of COVID and »isolation«. You will find more in-depth information in the newsletter.

A second highlight was our first aef-workshop on religious faith, psychotherapy and pastoral counseling in southern Germany and the third one is the new handbook on religion, spirituality and health edited by Prof. Harold Koenig coming out soon.

I am looking forward to meet you all latest on our European Conference in 2024 possibly in Salzburg.

René Hefti MD

Looking back 8th ECRSH-Conference in Amsterdam

Again the *European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health*, which was undertaken at *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam* and organized by our *Research Institute for Spirituality and Health (RISH)* in close and harmonizing cooperation with the *European Board* and the *Local Organizing Committee*, was a successful event with very well-respected lecturers from many nations, who discussed the conference's subject „*Religious, Spiritual and Existential Aspects in Mental Health Care*“ from interdisciplinary points of view.

As you may remember, our preceding newsletter contained a precious article by one of the keynote speakers, *Robert E. Emmons*, who is well known as one of the worldwide leading experts in the research field

of Positive Psychology, especially concerning gratitude. Of course our last newsletter is still available on the RISH-website, just like all the newsletters of the previous years, see URL below.

But there is another special service for you: You are invited to take part at the conference without any fee and obligations just by joining the ECRSH website, which contains abstracts, videos of the lectures in full length, and the PDF's of the presentations, see URL below. That's a great resource, please join it and use it!

Free access to lecture videos and more:
<https://ecrsh.eu/ecrsh-2022/programme/keynote-lectures-2>

Previous newsletters for download:
<https://figs.ch/de/netzwerk/newsletter>

Because the conference was organized as a hybrid event, it was possible, after the long period of abstinence caused by the pandemic, to meet live again. This was one of the highly appreciated experiences among the participants. But they were also impressed by the realized world wide networking.



Another keynote lecture was contributed by *Harold G. Koenig*, worldwide well known expert for spirituality and mental health, about „*Moral Injury*“, which has become an important subject of psychological research during the last decades, containing highly relevant spiritual aspects. Read the following summary.

Moral Injury Summary of Harold G. Koenig's Keynote Lecture

One of the keynote lectures at the 8th European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health June 2022 in Amsterdam was performed by Harold G. Koenig, professor at the Medical Center of Duke University in Durham, USA, about „Moral Injury“ (MI). Koenig himself is intensively engaged for the issue, which is mirrored by a number of articles.

The scientific research of MI started after the Vietnam war and was initially focussed on veterans, who had been victims, perpetrators or witnesses of events injuring their moral sentiment in an extreme manner. Hereby we already have a quite correct definition of MI at all, including the difference to *Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*. Moral aspects do not belong to the main symptoms of PTSD. Nevertheless the areas of PTSD and MI have much in common, because both problems result from traumatic experiences.

Empirical research on MI is somewhat new, whereas the experience itself is as old as mankind. Veterans of war are struck by MI to a very high degree. Meanwhile lots of studies have been published about the matter and a number of questionnaires in order to diagnose MI exist.

Koenig therefore recommends corresponding therapeutical methods. Besides psychological practices from conventional *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CPT)* and *Mindfulness Based Therapy*, for example *Adaptive Disclosure Training*, spiritually centered aids as *Building Spiritual Strength* and *Spiritual-Integrated Cognitive Processing Therapy*

(SICPT) should be used, complemented by interdisciplinary accesses in cooperation with theological experts as chaplains, who represent the individual confession of the concerned person.

For treatment of MI Koenig introduces a therapy schedule with SICPT containing 12 sessions. The basic model can be adapted according to the individual religious background of the person. Patients shall become aware of their own spiritual resources and learn an empathic encounter with their inner conflicts instead of blaming themselves. They shall deal with the meaning of guilt and forgiveness and succeed in helpful new appraisals. In order to internalize these they shall cultivate a closer connection to their religious community, if this is a problem, and a deeper personal spiritual life.



Harold G. Koenig

This schedule is complemented by a pastoral program, which also contains 12 sessions. It should be guided by a spiritually competent person and can be considered to be a matter of pastoral counselling.

The medical concept of MI originally stems from traumatic experiences in war. But meanwhile MI has become a severe factor in health services. This is emphatically addressed bei Koenig, which can easily be seen by taking a look at his lecture's headline: „Moral Injury in Mental Health Care - what can we learn from the Veterans Studies?“ To follow this direction seems to be an urgent task for

for further research.

You have free access to the whole video as well as to the PDF with the slides of his presentation. You just have to join the ECRSH-Website:

<https://ecrsh.eu/ecrsh-2022>

H.A. Willberg

An encouraging start First aef-Workshop on religious faith, psychotherapy and pastoral counseling

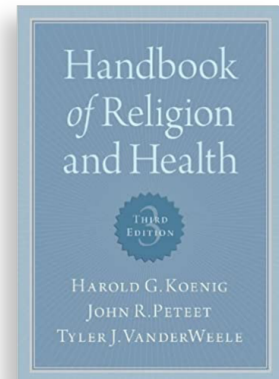
During springtime the „Arbeitskreis für Empirische Forschung zu Glaube, Psychotherapie und Seelsorge“ (aef) gathered to further constitute itself. In October 14-15 the first aef-Workshop was held at the *Internationale Hochschule Liebenzell* (IHL) near Suttgart in the northern area of Black Forest. First part of the event was a Pre-Workshop by *Professor Stefan Huber*, leader of the *Institute for Empirical Religious Research* at *Bern University*, Switzerland, concerning qualitative case studies with the purpose of reconstructing individual faith attitudes.

The second part was filled by several presentations of ongoing academic research enterprises in the fields of psychology and theology about matters of religious faith, psychotherapy and pastoral counseling, mainly master- and doctoral projects. Much time was taken for helpful discussions, led and contributed by the participating academic experts, among others *Prof. Ulrich Gieseke* of IHL and *Prof. Henning Freund* of *Ev. Hochschule Tabor* in Marburg, Germany. *Senior Lecturer René Hefti*, head of the *Research Institute of Spirituality and Health*, which is one of the providers of aef, was able to highlight the very constructive and intensive cooperation during the meeting.

The organizers are looking forward to the next planned meeting, which shall take place 2023 as a conference about Grace and Forgiveness.

The scientific benchmark Handbook of Religion&Health 3rd Edition in 2023

Koenig, Harold G., VanderWeele, Tyler J., Peteet, John R. (2023). *Handbook of Religion and Health*. 3rd Ed. Oxford University Press: New York.



For further informations see

<https://www.amazon.com/Handbook-Religion-Health-John-Peteet/dp/0190088850/>

Save the date!

The next ECRSH Conference is in sight! We already know, that it will happen **May 2024**, and the subject is also determined:

Spiritual Care Interventions

Besides there will be a **Research Workshop** again.

Imprint

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