

## RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY FROM PERSPECTIVE OF PUBLIC AND GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

Miro Jakovljevic

University Hospital Centre Zagreb, Department of Psychiatry, Zagreb, Croatia

\* \* \* \* \*

*“Lord, make me an instrument of your **peace**;  
Where there is hatred, let me sow **love**;  
Where there is injury, let me sow **forgiveness**;  
Where there is doubt, let me sow **faith**;  
Where there is despair, let me sow **hope**;  
Where there is sadness, let me give **joy**;  
O Master, grant that I may not so much to seek compassion  
but to give **compassion**” - The Prayer of Saint Francis*

Since last year we have intended to devote one issue of Psychiatria Danubina per year to public and global mental health (Jakovljevic 2016). This year we supported 24<sup>th</sup> International symposium: Science and Religion – 2,000 Years of Cooperation and Controversies, held in Islamic center Zagreb, from 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2017. Both, in academic and clinical psychiatry there have been increasing awareness of the relevance of spirituality and religiousness to mental health issues (Jakovljevic 2017a). Religion, as an organized system of beliefs, narratives, rituals, ceremonies, and symbols designed to facilitate closeness to the sacred, the transcendent, or to ultimate reality, may have significantly positive role in public and global mental health promotion. The time is ripe that psychiatry and religions cooperate in joint promoting the idea of “sound mind in sound body on sound society and sound religion” (Jakovljevic 2017b). Actions which have synergies with each similar system of ideas and beliefs are good to follow in order to promote public and global mental health. Psychiatry as well as almost each religion is about individual, family, public and global well-being, purpose and meaning of life, insight, love, growth and survival of our civilization. From the public and global mental health perspective it is very important to recognize a fundamental fact that human beings are a species that has evolved to thrive on love, kindness and compassion associated with our interconnectedness and interdependency. Although human history is full of atrocities, cruelties and evil behavior, empathy (Krznicaric 2014), compassion (Gilbert 2013) and altruism (Ricard 2015) have been defined as one of the most important and distinctive qualities of the human mind. Compassion, caring, prosocial and prohumanistic behavior are fundamental for well-being, mental health and our capacity to foster creative relationships with each other and the world we live in. Empathy is the invisible force that holds society and civilisation together. It involves empathy for difference and openness to diversity. Love, empathy, kindness, gentleness, and compassion are like basic food for healthy minds.



Technology has brought many comforts and huge materialistic advantages but at the cost of mental calmness and empathy. The Nobel prize winner Konrad Lorenz (1974) seems to have been right in great deal when warned that social changes turned our cultural wisdom into foolishness, our phylogenetic knowledge into ignorance of what to do or feel, our evolutionary virtues into eight deadly sins. Using parallels with animal world, Lorenz depicted eight, mutually reinforcing, biggest flaws of humanity: 1. “Over-population” with consequent the diffusion of responsibility and ruthless aggressiveness, 2. “Devastation of the environment” and altering the natural balance, with consequent atrophy of our esthetic and ethical feelings; 3. “Man’s race against himself” in form of ruthless competitiveness (“man is the predator of man”), with consequent stress, feeling of insecurity and poor health; 4. “Entropy of feeling” as hypersensitiveness to unpleasurable experience combined with a decreased capacity for pleasure and a childish insistence on instant

gratification; 5. "Genetic decay", the loss through domestication, through the loss of all delicately differentiated behavior pattern of courtship and pair formation, and of the natural sense of justice; 6. "Break with tradition" and consequent conflict between generations; 7. "Indoctrinability" - manipulation of the modern man, not only by political ideologies, but also by fashion and consumerism, and 8. "Nuclear weapons" and readiness to use it. Social, political and global changes and conditions like widespread poverty, disasters, violence, wars, unemployment, human rights violations, migrations, etc. may precipitate the breakdown of vulnerable people and social systems and contribute to an increasing incidence of mental disorders. Throughout the globe, unsound minds possessed by the destructive emotions of fear, anger, revenge and hate, politically or religiously driven, take us in a kind of group or collective madness associated with political and armed conflicts that occur between groups in a society or between nations with mass killings and destruction of nature and culture values. Many political leaders are not risk escaping but thrive politically on high risk believing that nothing succeeds like crisis" (see Toffler & Toffler 1995). Some of them have transformed their countries in "crazy states" (Tofflers's term). Wars all-over the globe are the significant source of mental health problems and psychopathology as well as a consequence of the particular collective psychopathology or ill mental health (see Jakovljevic & Tomic 2016). According to Toffler & Toffler (1995) "the way we make war reflects the way we make wealth – and the way we make anti-war must reflect the way we make war". People are encouraged to engage in conflicts and wars by those benefiting from them, so that one should work on developing immunity to warmongers (Staguhn 2007). Peace inducing activities as a way of life to create culture of peace and civilization of love are very important for the public and global mental health promotion. Due to the growing influence of global religions, from Islam to the Russian Orthodoxy to the fast-multiplying New Age sects, religions are now very important player, both in positive and negative way, in the world system, made up of regions, corporations, religions, non-governmental organizations, and political movements (Toffler & Toffler 1995). Global mental health illiterates are dangerous because they promote military force as the way to peace, and wars as the way to the better future. Both, wars and peace begin in the minds of men. In long term peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by mutually understanding, empathy, compassion and respect for what sound mental health is essential.

New ways of thinking about policy-making for public and global mental health are emerging, but are not yet fully grown. Research has indicated that practicing love, kindness, and compassion for ourselves and others builds our confidence, help us create meaningful, caring relation

ships, increases individual and community resilience and well-being, promotes human rights, physical and mental health. The fabric of public and global mental health is made of resilience, well-being, peace, security, solidarity, and mutual service. Public and global mental health is predicated on human rights, love, gratitude, reverence, empathy and compassion. Education for resilience, love, empathy and compassion are pillars and foundation of the global mental health. Almost all religions promote love, empathy, compassion and altruism as the essence of humanism and human condition. An operative faith, a faith that will move mountains, has been grounded in Love which practice patience in doing good. From the public and global mental health perspective religions can help people and communities to thrive and to turn our world from ill mental health, violence, self-centeredness, and narcissism toward kindness, empathy, compassion and love. The idea of creating a compassionate society and an empathic civilization might seem all too utopian, but spiritual people can dare to achieve UTOPIA (Universal/ Understanding, Transforming, Open-heartedness and mindedness, Piece Inducing Activities).

**Acknowledgements:** None.

**Conflict of interest:** None to declare.

## References

1. Gilbert P: *The Compassionate Mind. A New Approach to Life's Challenges*, Constable, London 2013.
2. Jakovljevic M: *Public and global mental health promotion for empathic civilisation: A new goal of Psychiatria Danubina*. *Psychiatr Danub* 2016; 28:312-314.
3. Jakovljevic M & Tomic Z: *Global and public mental health promotion for empathic civilisation: The role of political psychocultures*. *Psychiatria Danub* 2016; 28:323-333.
4. Jakovljevic M: *Psychiatry and religion: Opponents or collaborators – The power of spirituality in contemporary psychiatry*. *Psychiatr Danub* 2017a; 29(suppl 1):82-88.
5. Jakovljevic M: *Resilience, psychiatry and religion: Public and global mental health perspective*. *Psychiatr Danub* 2017b; 29:238-244.
6. Krznaric R: *Empathy – Handbook for Revolution*. Ebury Publishing, 2014.
7. Lorenz K; *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1974.
8. Ricard M: *Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and the World*. Atlantic Books, London, 2015.
9. Staguhn G: *Knjiga o ratu – Zašto ljudi ne mogu živjeti u miru? (Warum die Menschen keinen Frieden halten. Eine Geschichte des Krieges)*. Mozaik knjiga, Grupa Mladinska knjiga, Zagreb, 2007.
10. Toffler A & Toffler H: *War and Anti-War – Making Sense of Today's Global Chaos*. Werner Books, 1995.

## Correspondence:

Professor Miro Jakovljevic, MD, PhD  
University Hospital Centre Zagreb, Department of Psychiatry  
Kišpatićeva 12, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia  
E-mail: psychiatry@kbc-zagreb.hr