Linking the lecture on “Religion and Peace” to the lecture on “Autoethnography as a research methodology” Professor Ekkardt Sonntag started the session with his exposure to the concept of war at a young age. Quoting Professor Sonntag, “I was praying for peace in Lebanon since I was 5”. This quote resonated with me the most, since Lebanon is struggling with sectarian tension for years on end now.

The first session of the submodule mainly covered 4 parts; (i) history of religion and peace, (ii) definitions that are related to religion and peace, (iii) mediation in Middle Eastern sociocultural context, and (iv) interreligious dialogue. In history of religion and politics, the lecturer highlighted defining moments that brought everyone’s attention to the linkages between religion and politics, and how they can play a huge rule in affecting politics either negatively or positively. The first defining moment was the Iranian revolution in 1979, when Ayatollah Khomeini replaced the Pahlavi dynasty with an Islamic Republic. This was a defining moment as international politics undermined the role of religion during the Iranian revolution. Another important moment was Barrack Obama’s speech in Al Azhar in Cairo - Egypt, where he highlighted the importance of interfaith and interreligious dialogue to bridge the gaps and differences and build a peaceful world.

During the first session, we had a quick poll to see how everyone defines peace in their own terms. It was interesting to see that the answers were a mix of the different definitions, with the majority selecting “peace means a healthy community”. However, the different definitions were interlinked and intertwined in a way that it was hard to select one definition over the other.

The second session was a seminar, during which we had an exercise on dialogue. The exercise constituted of a solo work and a group work. During the solo work we were presented with 36 values from which we had to select 18 most and 18 least important ones important to us. Then we had to select the top 10 values for us from the 18 most important ones. For the second part of the practice, we were split into teams of 3-4, and I had the luck to be allocated with a very insightful group, where we discussed our top 10 values and why we selected them. Through the discussion we had I have come to realize that our values are more or less the same, but the only difference are how we define each of the words. We agreed on our top 10 list of values for the group, and through the discussion I also got to know my colleagues more.