

in an authoritative way, without an adequate and thorough reflection which might lead to a thorough solution of a pending problem being offered

- The “solutions” mostly consist of some rather general advice, without taking into account the concrete real persons

- Psychically unstable people can be seriously damaged by such a family constellation. Cases of suicide after a family constellation have happened and have been testified to

- Family Constellations according to Hellinger are deemed to be a spiritistic approach with shamanic overtones and this “therapy” is not suited as a psychotherapeutic treatment.

### Criticism from the Viewpoint of Pastoral Care

In his statements and publications, the former catholic theologian has more and more distanced himself from the Christian understanding of God:

- In place of the personal God, Hellinger sees a blind power of fate, which man has to bow to

- He claims, that in the end there is no absolute difference between good and evil

- Hellinger rejects the biblical God as a God of “violence”, and he equally rejects the idea of salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ

- The idea of a “reconciliation” with one’s ancestors in the case of sinful behaviour by perhaps parents or grandparents is repudiated as presumptuous. It is not up to those born later to judge the actions of the earlier generations. The younger ones are only to accept all that was. Only through this

kind of acceptance of fate can peace be found again

- The approach to Hellinger’s solutions is nourished by the kind of thinking which is irreconcilable with Christian thinking and with the Christian belief in salvation. It is thus inadvisable to take part in a Family Constellation according to Bert Hellinger.

### Sources (selection)

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Hellinger, B., Hovel G., Acknowledging What Is: Conversations With Bert Hellinger, Zeig, Tucker & Theisen 1999

Hellinger, B., No Waves without the Ocean: Experiences and Thoughts, Carl Auer International 2006

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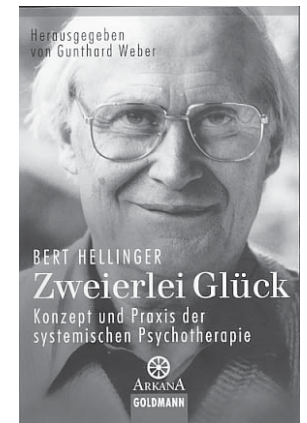
### On the subject of New Age, there is an informative document issued by the Church:

“Jesus Christ, the bearer of the waters of life”. Considerations on New Age from a Christian viewpoint. Rome 2003. This document can be downloaded via the following internet address: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_20030203\\_new-age\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_20030203_new-age_en.html)

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# Catchword Family Constellations according to B. Hellinger

Amongst the many offers within today’s health and therapeutic market place, we have for the last several years also seen the so-called “Family Constellation according to Bert Hellinger”. Even though this approach enjoys great popularity



Dubious promises of a psycho-guru

and in all its variants is highly accepted by many people, it is necessary to critically assess this practice too. Not only because experts reject this method as untrustworthy, but also because many questions arise, which touch on pastoral care and Christian Faith.

## Who is Bert Hellinger?

Suitbert (Bert) Hellinger was born as Anton Hellinger in Heidelberg (Germany) in 1925. After the war he entered into the religious congregation of the White Fathers and took the name Suitbert, which he kept even after leaving the congregation. After his theological studies Hellinger was consecrated as a catholic priest in the year 1952. Afterwards he worked for many years as a missionary in South Africa, where he also taught in schools. In 1968 he returned to Germany, but no longer felt comfortable in the changed circumstances – after the second Vatican Council – and finally left his congregation in 1971. He married and started with diverse psychological training courses, none of which he completed. Within these training courses, he also got to know various methods of working with families. Out of the respectable forms of psychotherapeutic family treatments, he chose the element of “Family Constellation” as an isolated practice. From the mid 90ies on he went more and more public with this approach. Over the following years, he continued to develop and refine his own form of so-called “family constellation”, and found numerous imitators for it.

## What is a “Family Constellation”?

Bert Hellinger does not care how his imitators deal with his practice. He denies any responsibility for anything, which is being taught or practised by others in his name. This leads to the fact, that “Family Constellation according to Hellinger” is prac-

tised and understood in very different ways.

There are no general standards or guidelines in this field. There is no barrier to the fantasy of the “therapists”. The original theory behind Hellingers practice claimed, that many problems a person experiences, whether in the area of health, of personal relationship or at work, are caused by unsolved problems within the family. Within the frame of a family constellation the patient is requested to find within a group of people (this can also be carried out in front of a large public) substitutes or surroga-



A respectable amount of titles concerning family constellations according to Hellinger floods the bookmarket

tes for personalities within his or her family. These people are then allocated within a room, as to how the patient sees them in relationship to each other. Finally a surrogate for the patient himself is also chosen. Thus the patient has done all he can and from that point on he or she only passively follows the developments. The surrogates will then – one

after the other – state what they feel and what kind of impression they have. The constellation’s moderator changes the position of the surrogates within the room and sometimes suggests sentences, they are to speak out aloud. This continues until everyone concerned “feels” that everything finally fits. The picture developing thus, is meant to be the solution for the patient’s problem. It is not permissible to discuss the situation, since this would endanger its validity and the therapy might lose its power.

## The Theory behind the Practice

According to Hellinger for each family, each tribe, there is a kind of family soul, which represents a “knowledgeable field”. In the moment of setting up the constellation, the surrogate personalities link into this “field” and - like a medium - they are able to reproduce or reflect what the real person, who they are surrogate to, is actually feeling. The aim of this constellation is to recognise fateful entanglements within the family and to acceptone’s fate.

## Criticism by Psychologists

Family Constellation according to Hellinger is defined as an untrustworthy and insufficient therapy by the German Society for Systematic Therapy and Family Therapy (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Systematische Therapie und Familientherapie – DGST), because:

- An esoteric-magical belief in fate is being communicated
- The moderator’s instructions are passed on