

**European Conference on Jewish-Muslim Dialogue, Brussels, 15-17.04.2007**  
**Rooting the Dialogue in Muslim Tradition.**

Looking back on the past two days, a number of impressions keep coming back to my mind:

\* The necessity of networking and information exchange between groups and individuals of our different faiths

\* The encouragement to "be proud of our traditions" and not to fade out into a "secularist grey" that was expressed in one of the workshops

\* The urgent question about the benefits and advantages of dialogue

At the same time I am aware that we, that is, the participants in this conference, are at different stages of dialogue.

For some it was a first encounter that went beyond information about each other. I call this the stage where we come to know each other and have a direct exchange. This is essential to counteract prejudices and discrimination and to work towards resolving conflicts.

A second stage is when we proceed to joint projects that promote interests we have in common and come to an agreement on how we handle our variety. I am happy to see that there are so many projects in Europe.

So what comes next?

Beyond the former two, our encounter presents a chance to refine and deepen our self-understanding, and it may open up new dimensions when we look at each our own tradition that can help to develop a vision for the future.

In this context, a passage from the Qur'an comes to my mind. It is somewhat long, and considering the time we have at our disposal I will quote only the parts that are relevant here, and only the translation.

We sent down the Torah containing guidance and light. With it, the prophets who had surrendered to God judged those who were Jewish, and likewise the rabbis and scholars, because they are enjoined to preserve God's scripture, and there were witnesses for it. Therefore do not fear people but fear Me and do not give up My signs for an insignificant gain. Those who do not judge according to what God sent down - they are the rejectors ...

There follows a quotation from the Torah and a passage mentioning the Christian scriptures that contain guidance and light on which Christian responsibility is based, and finally one addressed to Muhammad, referring to the Qur'an that was revealed to him, in the same line so to speak. The text continues:

... to each of you We have given a set of ethical and legal principles and a path. If God had wanted to, He would have made you all one single community, but He wants to test you with what He has given you. Therefore compete with each other for the good. To God is the final return of all of you, then He will enlighten you about what you used to differ in. 5:44-84

I am well aware that there are other, perhaps better known conflict-related texts in the Qur'an that permit fighting in self-defense within certain ethical limits. But this passage is dated after a time of conflict in Madina at the time of the Prophet Muhammad involving Jewish, Muslim and some other groups.

I am well aware that many Muslims have a supersessionist reading of the text: "We are last, the most up to date, so we are right." I must admit that I never thought much about this assumption until I studied text with rabbis and found them struggling with the Torah in order to find relevant guidance the same way as Muslim scholars struggle with the Qur'an.

I am therefore intrigued by the last paragraph. Here, a meaning is given to religious difference. Our faith groups are invited to compete with each other - not on pain, as it was phrased in one of the workshops, and not on hurting each other, as many religious institutions nowadays seem to do, but for the good, based on each our scriptures and our set of ethical principles.

Such a competition does imply a challenge not to settle too comfortably in each our traditions, institutions and habits until they lose their content, but to critically reevaluate our actions and development in order to keep it fresh and alive. It leads us beyond religion as a mere tradition, connecting with the prophetic element in it.

I find this important as our encounter progresses from ordinary dialogue to interfaith learning. In today's world, it becomes increasingly clear that our human responsibility for our society and creation is a shared one that we face together. It is no longer possible in simple terms of "black and white" or "we and they". Nor is it possible as an anonymous "grey" mass. It is, however, possible as lively witnesses for the values taught in our tradition - in all the beautiful colours that are possible in creation - certainly more than the 16 millions that even an ordinary computer screen can present.

**Halima Krausen**