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## **Diocese of Egypt and North Africa with The Horn of Africa**

by the Revd Raja Zabaneh, Bishop's Assistant For Interfaith Relations

- Egypt is a republic with Islam as the state religion. Approximately, 90% of Egyptians are Muslims the rest of the population are Christians.
- the real number of Christians 2006 World Fact book estimates that they constitute about 7.6 million or 10% of the Egyptian population.

### **Historical Background of Egypt**

- Christianity entered Egypt in the first half of the first century A.D.
- In 639 an army of some 4,000 men were sent to Egypt under the command of Amr ibn al-As.
- When Islam entered Egypt after the defeat of the Romans on the hands of the Arabs, most Egyptians converted to the new religion while some Egyptians remained Christians When Amr Ibn El Aas, the Arabian army leader, conquered the Romans he assured people that their lives and belongings will not be touched, they will be safe in their homes
- The commitment of the Egyptians in early ages with Islam, and the engagement of their history with the Islamic ideology, have strengthened the most powerful tie, and strongest relations between them and their faith. The thing that helped them a lot in their struggle against all the hard challenges.
- Sustainability of the Interfaith Dialogue is due to the common identity of Egyptians.

### **The Diocese of Egypt and the Interfaith Dialogue**

- Consecutive meetings with the interfaith Committee in the Diocese and the interfaith Committee in Al Azhar, to strengthen the Dialogue Concept not only among leaders and decision makers but also among decisions executives and nationally basis.

### **Planting the tree of Hope Project**

- A joint project in coordination with the Episcopal Church in Egypt and Al Azhar El Sharif and the Ministry of Education to implement the Dialogue concept through developing the Educational system starting from primary classes passing through the higher classes.
- The Impact of this project is via competitions between several schools, networking, trips, and Family awareness programs where we find a lack of understanding in this issue and to let the students learn the Culture of dialogue.

### **Problems Encountering the Interfaith Dialogue**

- Lack of Understanding to Both Religions.
- Lack of acceptance to Others Beliefs
- Criticizing without Clarifying

### **Planning to Demolish these problems**

- Planting the Tree of Hope Project aiming to strengthen in our Children the Dialogue Culture.
- Advocacy through the Media to promote the culture of Dialogue.
- Sessions and Seminars to enable Muslims and Christians to learn their beliefs.

### **Egypt is Affiliated to all the Arab World**

Libya - The concept of the accepting and respecting other beliefs was shown from the leader of the Islamic movement, in donating a Church from the 14th Century to the Anglican Church of Egypt

### **Publishing Papers of Dialogue**

- Dialogue is the language of Jesus Christ... He used to teach and preach through dialogue and he used the language of dialogue to bring people to the truth.
- As well who reads the Holy Qur'an will find verses that commend dialogue as a method to solve numerous issues between different parties.
- By practicing dialogue, we deny a victory to those who would attempt to use religion to divide all humanity.
- Through interfaith dialogue, we can change the world for the better.

## **Ghana - Interfaith Relations in Ghana: Faith and Citizenship**

### **Introduction**

Ghana has an estimated population of 20 million, comprising of over 60 different language and ethnic groups. On the religious front, the population is made up of adherents of African traditional religion, Christians, Muslims and more recently, pockets of religions and sects of Eastern origin. Christianity, Traditional religion and Islam are, however, the three dominant religions. According to the 2000 population census, Ghanaians are predominantly Christian, with more than two-thirds (68.8%) of the total population claiming to be Christian. Muslims are the second largest religious group with 15.9% followed by practitioners of Traditional African Religions with 8.5%.

Ghana is divided into ten political administrative regions. The Northern region is home to the largest Muslim community in the whole country (home to over a third of the total Muslim population). The most Islamised ethnic groups in Ghana are the Dagomba, Gonja, Mamprusis, Walas and the Bisa to some extent; all of northern extractions. We also have small proportions of southern ethnic groups like Fantis and Ashantis who are followers of the Ahmadiyya Movement which for that reason is locally known as "Fante or Asante Nkramo", i.e. Fante or Asante Islam in contradistinction to mainstream Islam patronized by people of northern Ghanaian origin and West African nationals. A number of Gas of the costal area are also found in mainstream Islam.

### **Celebration and Confrontation**

There is a Ghanaian proverb which says "too much meat does not spoil soup". On the whole, this proverb typifies the Ghanaian and indeed African ethno-religious make-up. At all levels, Christians and Muslims mix and do things in common right from the family to national levels. At the national level Ghana has a Catholic President and a Muslim vice who were sworn into office by a lay Methodist Chief Justice. Muslim chiefs in northern Ghana are known to invite Christians to come and plant churches within their domain. Christians and Muslims attend each other's religious festivals and services. Easter, Christmas, Id ul-fitr and id ul-adha are all national holidays celebrated by all. Muslim and Christian leaders attend and/or deliver goodwill messages at each other's national conferences, synods and conventions. Muslims ask for and appreciate Christian prayers offered in the name of Jesus! Similarly Muslims offer prayers for political leaders irrespective of their religious affiliation.

That is the good news. The bad news is that Ghana has had her fair share of inter-religious tensions and violence. In the mid 90s inter-religious violence in some key cities like Accra, Takoradi, Kumasi and Tamale were common phenomena. In Accra one source of inter-religious tension has been a controversial traditional ban on noise making, especially drumming for the duration of a month. Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians have always defied the ban claiming it is an infringement on their freedom of worship leading to confrontation and violence with adherents of primal religions and traditional authorities. After a series of interventions and meetings, this issue is now almost resolved with most Christians observing the traditional annual ban on noise making.

There is a history of tension and violent confrontations between different Muslim groups in Ghana, especially between Ahmadis and mainstream Muslim groups. The bloody confrontations of the early 1930s between Ahmadis and mainstream Sunni Muslims gave way to mutual suspicion, contempt and non-cooperation up until the end of the last century. Now there are attempts on the part of the national leadership to build bridges. A clear sign was December 2006 when the National Chief Imam attended the Ahmadiyya annual convention for the very first time and delivered a goodwill message. Another level of tension is that between indigenous Ghanaian Muslims and other West African nationals over leadership. The latter see themselves as the rightful custodians of the Islamic tradition and resent taking subordinate roles to indigenous Ghanaian Muslims. This has resulted in a number of violent confrontations during Friday prayers leading to the closure of a number of mosques by the authorities.

Between the mid and late 90s there were a number of violent confrontations between missionary minded Muslim groups made up of graduates from Arab universities and the majority traditional Ghanaian Muslim groups. The most notorious of these groups is what is known locally as the Ahl ul-Sunna, a Saudi trained Wahhabi inspired group. They verbally attack and publicly condemn traditional Muslim practices like production of charms and wearing of amulets which they see as mixing Islam with traditional religious practices and as such un-Islamic. The brand of Islam they see as 'pure' or 'orthodox' is that which is espoused in Saudi Arabia or other parts of the Arab-Muslim world.

Direct Christian-Muslim conflicts in Ghana have been few and far in between. Back in the mid 1990s there were isolated instances of Muslim groups attacking Christian preachers or churches for allegedly insulting Islam. These incidents took place in cities like Kumasi and Takoradi. Both in these places, Presbyterian churches were the targets of Muslim fury. In one of the instances, the leadership of both communities met at the national level and resolved to share the cost of repairing the damage caused. In some cases, Muslim groups attacked Christian preachers for provocative preaching and alleged insults against their beliefs. These confrontations have largely subsided and there has hardly been any such Muslim-Christian violence since the beginning of this century.

### **Factors Influencing Christian-Muslim Relations**

Historical/Colonial Factors: Colonial policies of banning missionaries from 'Muslim' areas contributed in widening the divide between Muslims and Christians especially in the areas of education and development. This has resulted in a situation whereby in Ghana Christians who are mostly southerners are generally better educated and the south better developed than Muslims who are generally northerners. This has been a source for stereotypical perceptions and resentment.

British policy of Indirect Rule which led to imposing Muslim rulers over non-Muslim groups especially in British Protectorate of northern Ghana contributed to the legacy of resentment most of which boiled over into open conflicts after independence. In one such conflict in 1994 between the Gonjas and Konkombas in northern Ghana, a Presbyterian minister was killed in his manse in Salaga while some Churches and Church institutions were attacked by Gonja fighters who are predominantly Muslim. Memories of Muslim slavery in parts of northern Ghana evoke resentment on the part of the victims and reinforce stereotypical views of the other and sense of superiority on the part of the erstwhile raiding parties. All of these tend to negatively impact Muslim-Christian relations in Ghana.

### **Muslim Dawah and Christian Missions**

Ahmadis have a long tradition of polemical public preaching in Ghana. The leadership of the group which for a long time was dominated by Pakistanis, apparently imported polemical preaching from the 19th century Indian sub-continent. Ahmadiyya instituted public preaching against Christianity and mainstream Islam in Kumasi in the early 1930s. Until then Muslim and Christians simply minded their own business so to speak. Ahmadi anti-mainstream Islamic and anti-Christian preaching provoked bloody confrontations with mainstream Muslims in parts of Ghana. Ahmadis toned down their attacks on mainline Muslims with the appointment of the first Ghanaian leader of the Movement in the mid 1970s focusing their polemics mainly against Christians. In 2004 in Tamale in northern Ghana, the Regional Minister had to warn a Pakistani Ahmadi preacher who constantly attacked Christian practices, beliefs and the Bible on radio. Other mainstream Sunni groups joined the preaching

bandwagon back in the 1980s leading to the proliferation of audio tapes and other literature to win non-Muslims to Islam and to show how wrong Christianity is.

As the pool of Traditional believers from which Christians and Muslim use to fish dries up, the two missionary religions are now fishing from each others ponds. Christian groups have sprung up with the sole aim of converting Muslims to Christianity. The most popular of these ministries is the Converted Muslims' Christian Association now called the Straight Way Chapel in Kumasi. This ministry was started in the late '80s in Kumasi by a convert from Islam and now operates in many parts of the country. Public preaching is conducted by this and similar groups in Muslim dominated neighbourhoods. Muslim converts are paraded in churches and at conventions to give "testimonies" about Islam and their conversion, most of which involve exaggerations and blatant distortions. Many have learnt lessons from the resultant attacks and are now toning down their polemics.

### **Political Interference and Opportunism.**

Even though Ghana is a secular country, it has a long history of politicians manipulating religion for their political ends. The PNDC military government of the 1980s which started out with pro-Communist policies, pulled down the central mosque in Accra to make way for a car park. This evoked anger and curses from the Muslim community both local and abroad. Later on however, especially after the fall of communism, and in the eyes of some Ghanaians, the government seems to have lurched towards Islam and Muslim countries as possible alternative allies. In 1989, certain steps were taken by the Government which were widely viewed by the Christian population as attempts to undermine religious freedom in general and Christianity in particular.

First came an attempt to ban all broadcast of Christian gospel music over the national radio and television. Then followed the taking control over administration and replacing 'religious instruction' with 'cultural studies' in the curriculum of Christian Mission schools. Other measures included the enactment of an infamous 'Religious Registration Law' requiring all religious groups in the country to register with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism under conditions viewed by the mainline Christian leadership as dubious. These policies have long been reversed.

At the time that Christians were feeling they were coming under undue pressure from the government, a policy of positive discrimination was adopted towards Muslim Missionary schools, popularly referred to in Ghana as 'English/Arabic school'. The Government provided financial, personnel and material support for these schools. It permitted and in fact paid for the teaching of Arabic in the schools which in the eyes of Ghanaian Christians and Muslims alike is inextricably linked to the promotion and propagation of Islam. The Government also declared Idd-ul-Fitr and Idd ul-adha as national holidays. These policies are all still operative.

All these developments raised a sense of concern amongst most Ghanaian Christians. Since the change of government in 2001, most of the leadership of major Protestant denominations are viewed by Muslims and wider Ghanaian society as sympathetic if not openly supportive of the ruling party. The leadership of these churches who were once constant critics of the PNDC/NDC government in the 90s have become less critical of the present ruling party, the New Patriotic Party or NPP. Both leading political parties are vying for Muslim votes with the NDC portraying itself and generally viewed as the party with the largest Muslim/northern following. In order not to be outdone the ruling NPP government continues the tradition of government using tax-payers money to subsidise Muslim pilgrimage and is building a huge mosque for Muslims in Accra. Party politics may therefore have build bridges between ordinary Muslims and Christians but it has also opened up new frontlines of polarization in Ghanaian society.

External Factors: Muslim countries tend to export their own rivalries into Ghanaian Muslim community by supporting and funding different Muslim groups. This is especially so with Saudi Arabia, Libya and Iran who compete at funding rival Muslim groups. Ghanaians felt the reverberations of the Impact of 9/11 and subsequent US led invasion of Iraq. Churches were threatened in Tamale but tension was diffused through personal contact with the local Chief Imam who condemned the threats in strong terms in the mosque and on the local FM stations. In October 2006 there were reports in the Ghanaian media of al-Qaida tapes in circulation in the capital, Accra. The National Chief Imam issued a strong statement publicly condemning such videos.

### **Family, ethnic and other bonds**

There are numerous "inter-faith households" and members of same ethnic groups adhering to different religious persuasions. In such cases, bonds of family and ethnicity are stronger than religious affiliations and serve to neutralize religious animosities and in fact build interfaith bridges. There are instances where relatives of the Christian and primal religious traditions are called upon to contribute money for Muslim relatives to perform the pilgrimage in Mecca. Muslims attend ordination services involving Christian relations, friends or neighbors. Annual traditional festivals which are now a common feature of the Ghanaian religious calendar afford Christian, Muslim and their traditional counterparts of the various ethnic groups the opportunities for solidarity, renewal of ties and contribution towards developmental projects.

In Ghana, when we talk of people of different religions, especially Muslims, we are not talking about a community of immigrants or illegal immigrants or historical invaders and colonizers as in other places like the West, North Africa, Sudan or even Northern Nigeria. Muslims in Ghana are close relations and have always been full fledged citizens. Muslims and Christians work together very closely in various political parties. In most cases, party political loyalties override those of denominational or sectarian religious considerations. Hence it is common to find Muslims and Christians who share a lot in common in politics than they do with their co-religionists. As a result, though it has become an unspoken norm in Ghana to share the highest offices of president and vice-president between Christians and Muslims, many Muslims will vote for two Christians standing on the platform of a particular political party rather than an all Muslim ticket on a rival political platform! It can therefore be said that in Ghana Muslims and Christians don't have a luxury to tolerate one another. We actually literally celebrate each other!

### **Christian responses to the Muslim presence**

It is fair to say Ghanaian Christians are not adequately prepared to respond to the challenge of the Muslim presence. Until very recently, very few seminaries taught Islam as a small part of comparative religion. The notion of a Muslim amongst the majority of southern Ghanaian Christians is that of a dirty, illiterate watchman from the north or uncouth bunch of strangers living in the dirtiest and filthiest part of the city known as zongos. These perceptions, however, have more to do with ethnic prejudices southerners generally harbour and express towards northerners than with religious ones. To such Christians of southern extraction, the Muslim presence has little or no relevance let alone consequence to them. It must be said, though, that in the wake of 9/11 and the recent shari'ah related violence in Nigeria is awakening some of the Christian leaders from their deep slumber on Christian-Muslim issues.

Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians on their part generally see Muslims purely as objects of evangelism. As far as this group of Christians are concerned, the only legitimate relationship a Christian can have with a Muslim is in the area of evangelism. The study of Islam to such Christians is always geared at looking for the "weaknesses" in order to prove to Muslims that there is no salvation in Islam.

There are however those who are seriously seeking to promote a better understanding of Islam and trying to creatively address the Muslim presence. The Christian Council of Ghana has an Interfaith Desk which seeks to organise seminars on Islam for Christians. Response to this approach is still very low key but set to pick up in momentum. If Ghanaians are to live to the proverb that 'too much meat does not spoil soup' then more needs to be done by injecting some intellectual dialogue into the dialogue of life for the latter on its own has proven in many instances to be very fragile.

It is in this connection that the Presbyterian Church of Ghana officially took a decision during the last General Assembly to establish an Interfaith Research and Resource Centre with the aim of informing and equipping the Church to respond biblically and intellectually to the Muslim presence. The Centre which takes off formally in September 2007 will work in partnership with all mainline protestant and Pentecostal denominations to organise seminars on interfaith issues, run short certificate courses on Islam and Interfaith Relations for Christians, facilitate Christian-Muslim dialogue sessions on issues of common interest and concern as well as initiate an academic programme of study on Islam and Interfaith Relations through the Akrofi-Christaller Institute.

### **Factors that undermine a sense of citizenship:**

In Ghana like in all African countries there are multiple layers of identity labels. These include the clan, ethnic, religious and national. The concept of the Nation State is the new arrival on the market-shelf of multiple identities. The nation state of Ghana is therefore having to compete with the older identity categories for the loyalty of Ghanaians. The competition has been complicated and in some cases undermined by the fact that the nation state is an artificial and arbitrary creation of outsiders, Western European colonial masters. The artificial lines called 'boundaries' have split ethnic communities into different countries. In these situations the choice of citizenship or faith in the nation Ghana is pitted against that of ethnic identity which is no respecter of national boundaries. In these cases the sense of citizenship always suffers.

Another undermining factor is the failure on part of state to earn the trust and confidence of citizens. Lack of good governance, local grievances of injustices and regional feelings of neglect in national development are all contributory factors. In the last month in Ghana, northern Ghanaians have organised number of demonstrations against the state for neglecting their areas and a group has recently emerged putting together a legal case against the British government seeking compensation for been responsible for the historical neglect of the north. Tied to lack of good governance is the issue of endemic corruption of state structures. Overwhelming majority of Ghanaians have little or no faith at all in the judicial system and security agencies of the state. The tendency

therefore is for people to fall back on their ethnic and religious groupings, take the law into their own hands, and seek justice the form and way they know best.

## **Concluding Remarks**

In my estimation therefore, the issue of citizenship is not a lack of trust between different faith communities, certainly not necessarily mutual mistrust between Muslims and Christians. It is lack of confidence and faith on the part of both Muslims and Christians in the state. Two things are needed in my judgement. First is a common unifying factor at the national level. In Ghana, the national football team, the Black Stars, and now the personality of Kofi Annan, immediate past UN Secretary General, seems to be the only strong unifying factors that is able to bring Ghanaians together. Secondly, Christians and Muslims need to unlock themselves from the secular-democracy versus shariacracy debate and together explore ways of fashioning more credible political and judicial systems that can compete with the older identity categories for the faith and confidence of the citizens. I don't think we can do this successfully unless and until African Muslim and Christians are prepared and permitted to take responsibility for their respective faith traditions to which they are the majority adherents compared to the historic centres of the Christian and Islamic traditions.

## **Liberia**

*The Revd Canon Dr Herman Browne was asked at no notice to speak about his home country. He spoke with affection of the greenness and beauty of the countryside and with a sense of optimism for the future. The following brief note records key points.*

Nearly 80% of the country is neither Muslim nor Christian, but adherents of African Traditional Religions. Whilst a significant part of our commercial sector was handled by Muslims, Christians dominated the political scene, and remain predominantly urban.

The civil crisis presented both Muslim and Christian communities with the singular task of having to preach peace. This endeavour generated an unprecedented level of co-operation that resulted into a common plan for the removal of former Pres. Charles Taylor, the deployment of ECOWAS military troops, demobilisation of soldiers, and the immediate launch of relief items. This four point plan was adopted and implemented by ECOWAS which has led to the presence of UNMIL in the country and a remarkably peaceful country to date.

There were clear signs that Liberia was getting back on its feet again. The resilience of Liberians was again demonstrated clearly with the election of her (and Africa's) first female President. There are gradual signs of significant progress in her 12months in office. In the areas of:

1. governance and accountability
2. appointment of highly competent Cabinet ministers
3. Her own accessibility to the people and her promotion of press freedom
4. Foreign investment in development initiatives in areas of clinics, schools, electricity, roads,
5. increment and regular payment of civil servant wages.

## **An Introduction to the Country of Pakistan**

### **By The Rev. Canon Patrick Pervez Augustine**

"... It is the will of the people of Pakistan to establish an order ... where shall be guaranteed fundamental rights, including equality of status, of opportunity and law, social, economic and political justice, and freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship and association..." from the Preamble, Constitution of Pakistan

### **Pakistan - History**

The Pakistan Movement took shape in the early part of the 20th century. Although the vision of Pakistan was first given by Muhammad Iqbal in 1930 during his famous address at Allahabad, it was clear long before then that there was a Hindu-Muslim disharmony that could not be ignored forever. Muslims had been rulers over a large

part of the sub-continent for about 800 years. During the British Raj Muslims felt marginalized and they had become a minority. Ultimately, the “two nation theory” emerged, which stated Muslims and Hindus could not live together because they had different ways of life. Thus, a movement for a separate nation called Pakistan took shape, focusing on “Islam” as the basis for Muslim unity. Unlike other nationalism that have emerged in other places of the world in the struggle for freedom, such as Turkic, Arab, and Malay nationalism, etc., the Muslims of India were of different ethnicities, languages and cultures, united only by the slogan of Islam.

Pakistan was created on August 14 1947 to be a homeland for the Muslims of the Indian Sub-Continent. The revivalists, particularly Abul Ala Mawdudi’s group and some rationalists insisted that Pakistan is a new homeland for Muslims. It was formed with the slogan, *Pakistan ka matlab kya, la ilaha illa Allah*, meaning, “What is the meaning of Pakistan? There is no God but Allah!” (The cry rhymes in Urdu).

The founding father of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Jinnah and his compatriots were secular modernists in their outlook and practice, at the same time appealing to popular Islamic sentiments as a way to rally the people. In a famous speech at Independence on August 15, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, advocated religious tolerance and the right of every individual to practice his own religion. He emphasized that in the state of Pakistan religion was to be a private matter. Within a year popular protests had forced the leaders to change track. The precise role which Islam should play in public life has since been a major feature of political discourse.[1] Sadly, that ideal has been eroded as successive governments have implemented a program of Islamisation. The landmark event that took place shortly after the founding of Pakistan was the approval of the Objectives Resolution. The points in the resolution were designed to govern any constitution that would be written. These points could be summed up: (1) Sovereignty belongs to God, not the people, and (2) no law shall be framed that is repugnant to the Qur’an and Sunnah. Islamists believe that the future of Islamic revival is destined to commence from Pakistan.

Until 1971, the country consisted of East and West Pakistan separated by 1,000 miles of Indian territory having little but Islam in common. After a brutal war, East Pakistan became Bangladesh, a separate nation. Pakistan’s history has been unsettled right from its creation, and is still unstable. “What we in Pakistan have consciously constructed instead is rule by a small elite—never democratic—all working with a tribal-feudal mind-set, ‘in the name of the people’ with democratic camouflage. This small elite comprises of feudal barons, tribal warlords, and politicians of all hues. In Pakistan we inherited a feudal, patriarchal society. The population is divided into vertical compartments of provinces, tribes, clans, castes, and subcastes.—Our history of dysfunctional democracy has caused us great grief, most hauntingly in the separation of East Pakistan in 1971.”

Pakistan is divided into four provinces: Sind, Baluchistan, Punjab and the North West Frontier Province. The country is a kaleidoscope of different ethnic groups, each very distinct. One estimate is that 70 different languages are spoken in Pakistan but in general citizens have one thing in common: Islam.

### **The Situation Today and the Concerns of non-Muslims in Pakistan**

Pakistan’s total population is 138 million. Non Christians known as minorities comprise four percent or less of the population. According to Pakistan’s Year Book Christians are 3% of the population. A similar number of other religious minorities like Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhist and Bahai’s also live in Pakistan.

#### **Following are the major concern minorities face in Pakistan:**

1. The first is the issue of a separate electorate. Since its inception the nation has been divided into two camps of voters, Muslims and non-Muslim. Non Muslims have separate seats and can be elected only to this certain number of seats. This requirement has cut Christians and minorities off from mainstream politics and has turned them into second-class citizens.

2. The second issue is the controversial blasphemy law. In 1982, under President General Zia Ul-Haq, Blasphemy Law section 295-B was passed. This law dealt with defiling the Holy Qur’an, a crime to be punished with life imprisonment. Four years later, section 295-C was added, concerning offenses against Prophet Muhammad, which were to be punished with life imprisonment or death and a fine.

This section was given even greater force when the federal Shari’at Court in

Pakistan ruled that the life imprisonment option should be disallowed, leaving death as the mandatory sentence for defiling the name of Prophet

Muhammad. This ruling was enforced in 1991. The problems of bribery and corruption and passions of an illiterate society preclude the opportunities for a fair trial even for the poor Muslim masses, let alone poor minorities who have no way of protecting themselves from false or impulsive accusations.

3. The Third concern is the legal rights. In normative interpretations of Islamic law, non Muslims cannot give any testimony in cases involving had common law with divinely defined punishment). The law also requires two women witnesses to equal the testimony of one man (for Muslims and non-Muslims alike). In the law of Qisas (retaliation), non-Muslims testimony is accepted only if the accused is also a non-Muslim. These laws, although part of an interpretation of Islamic law, can be interpreted to be counter to the norms of human rights and pluralism that are being advocated the world over.

4. The fourth concern is that of conversion, which raises a number of issues. When minor children convert to Islam, for example, it is possible, as was ruled in one magisterial decision, that they can be taken from the custody of their Christian parents and placed in Muslim families.

5. The fifth major concern has to do with education. Students in grade school must take Islamic studies as a mandatory subject. While at an earlier time non-Muslim students were allowed to elect exams in their own traditions, this option was withdrawn in 1962. Certain basis in the syllabus hamper the growth of a pluralistic society. According to the article, "the curriculum seems to encourage Islamization of non-Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

### **Christians in Pakistan:**

98% Christians in Pakistan live in Punjab; approximately 60% of whom live in the villages. Most of the Christian in Punjab were converted from the lower-caste Hindu background. There are also recent tribal Hindus landless workers in Sind, who have recently converted to Christianity, coming from the Katchi, Parkar, Kholis and Marwaries tribes. These people before they were converted were poor, illiterate, exploited and were kept out of the political-economic order of the day. The Christians though better today, does not reflect any major progress in spite of some hundred plus years of consistent missionary aid and development.

The Roman Catholics constitute about 55%, and the rest are divided among different Protestant denominations. Among Protestant the Church of Pakistan (a United comprising of the Anglicans, American Methodists, Scottish Presbyterians and Scandinavian Lutherans constitute the largest group, followed closely by the American Presbyterians, and the rest are Evangelical churches constituting a very small percentage.<sup>4</sup>

### **Examples of the impact of the Islamic laws:**

In Islamabad, a Muslim professor, Dr. Sheikh at a medical college in 2004 was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to death after students complained about him to the local religious leaders. Dr. Sheikh in a letter from Central Jail Rawalpindi complained about the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan which, he said, "is wide open to abuse, through and by the miscreant mullahs for political, repressive and vindictive purposes on the pretext of undefined blasphemy... its abuse is a rising wave of aggressive ignorance, incivility and intolerance as well as the medieval theocratic darkness."

Dr. Sheikh noted that his trial was held in Camera inside the jail. "The learned court ... succumbed to threats and after dubious in camera proceedings sentenced me to the death penalty under the said Blasphemy Law 295/C PPC without good evidence ... even my solicitors were harassed with a fatwa (bull) of apostasy and they were threatened with the lives of their children."

May 6, 1998, The Rt. Rev. Dr. John Joseph, Roman Catholic bishop of Faisalabad and a high profile human rights activist, shot himself dead in the dark corridors of a sessions court in Sahiwal in protest against the death sentence recently given to a poor Christian Ayub Masih for blaspheming Islam. This is the same spot where Ayub Masih, a Christian of his diocese, was shot at on 6 November 1997. Earlier on the day of his death the late Bishop sent a open letter to Pakistan's largest English language newspaper, Dawn. Following are the two excerpts from Bishop Joseph's letter:

After several serious consultations, the following points became clear: "We have to act in unity and coordination: The bishops inside and outside Pakistan, the parliamentarians inside and outside the parliament, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, men, women and the youth, all in harmony, Pakistani NGOs and NGOs abroad to support the repeal of Sections 295-B and C in the Pakistan Penal Code. Now we must act strongly and in unity, without worrying about the sacrifices we shall have to offer. Dedicated persons do not count the cost.

The Final push: 295-C is the greatest block in the good and harmonious relations between Muslims and the religious minorities in Pakistan. In order to achieve national harmony, let us give a mighty push to this immense boulder, before it crushes all of us. Once this obstacle is away, each Pakistani will be able to live and work in peace and our beloved motherland, Pakistan will prosper. Let us pray continuously for it, publicly are in private, throughout the country. Amen.

### **Why Such Militancy in Pakistan:**



Pakistan since 1970s has been breeding ground for a number of militant groups. This is in part a by-product of the Afghanistan conflict. In order to defeat the Soviets, the US Saudi Arabia, China and Egypt assisted and armed Afghan mujahideen and others, including Arab militants, to fight against the Soviet invaders. Through Pakistan, the CIA provided weapons and funds, eventually totaling more than 3 billion dollars, to a fratricidal alliance of seven Afghan resistance groups, none of whose leaders were by nature democratic, and most of whom to a greater or lesser extent fundamentalist in religion, autocratic in politics, and venomously anti-American in both respects.

Once the Soviet machine was defeated, the US quickly dropped the Afghan problem and abandoned support to Pakistan. The US began to return to its all-consuming non-proliferation agenda, under which Washington withdrew all economic and military assistance to Pakistan. The Pakistan government and the Jihadi Islamic forces felt abandoned and betrayed by the West.

Christians are often seen by Muslims as party to the West. After 9/11 there have been attacks on the worshippers in Pakistani churches and Christian schools and hospitals. On October 29, 2001 four gunmen entered inside St. Dominic's Church, Bahawalpur and started shouting: "Pakistan and Afghanistan, graveyard of Christians. Allah is Great. This is just the start." They opened fire and killed 17 Christians. Since then a senseless slaughter of Christians has been repeatedly done several times in different parts of Pakistan.

A culture of militancy, weapons, and drugs now flourishes in Pakistan. A deadly al Qaeda terrorist network entrenched itself in our major cities and the mountains of our tribal agencies on our western border with Afghanistan. A culture of targeted killing, explosives, car bombs, and suicide attacks took root. ... Today, the central masses are confused about where Islam actually stands on various issues facing the world in general and the Muslim world in particular. They need to be drawn away from the clerics' obscurantist views, and toward the enlightened, progressive, moderate message of Islam. The challenge is great, no doubt, but it is eminently achievable.

### **Building Bridges—Building the Kingdom of God:**

Over the centuries, both Christianity and Islam expanded through empire and on a few but terrible occasions have confronted each other in conflict. Woe unto us if we allow a clash of civilisations to develop along the lines that the scholar Samuel Huntington suggested could be in prospect. With the weapons of mass destruction that exist in our technological age, a truly awesome conflict between the two could result in bloodshed on an unimaginable scale. A cause of hope for lies in the fact that two great missionary faiths of Christianity and Islam now increasingly are encountering each other, especially in the West, not by empire building but by migration. Pakistani Muslims now live in the neighbourhoods of Christians and non-Christians as minorities. There are tremendous opportunities to build bridges on an individual, neighbourhood and community scale. Our task is to live together in peace and to talk with each other so that even the simplest levels of dialogue can develop the awareness of common values and aspirations that lead to mutual understanding, tolerance and even co-operation.

An excellent example of bridge building and peace making is the story of Bishop David Smith of the Anglican Diocese of Bradford, England, and Mr. Ishtiaq Ahmed, Information Officer for the Bradford Council of Mosques and Director of the Racial Equality Council, set an excellent example in October 1997 by visiting Shantingar, a Christian village in Pakistan burnt by Muslim extremists in February 1997. They traveled together to both Muslim and Christian places of worship and shared the message of peace and reconciliation.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Williams visiting Pakistan in November 2005 spoke to a group of Muslims and Christians and encouraged constructive dialogue between two faith Communities. He said, "Dialogue is not debate; dialogue is not proselytism; dialogue is not the attempt to persuade; dialogue is not negotiation. When I enter dialogue with someone of another religious tradition ... I am not out to secure agreement, but to secure understanding. An honest and constructive dialogue leads us to go away thinking 'Now I begin to see a little better what it is like to hold those views, pray those prayers and to live those lives'. "Dialogue is possible, dialogue is necessary and, happily, by the grace of God, dialogue is above all, actual. The very fact of our meeting this afternoon is, I hope and pray, a sign of how that dialogue can and will unfold in the years ahead."

If we embrace the idea of dialogue, if we would reach out to foster understanding and create bonds of community, how do we—Christians or Muslims, as a practical matter—go about doing so? What should be our agenda? What are some concrete ways in which we can overcome mutual suspicion?

The Church in Pakistan may be small but its witness to peace, harmony and reconciliation can be a powerful tool to heal the nation. As Christian we should let the light of Christ's love shine in our lives, as we follow the Golden Rule of doing to others as we would have them do unto us, and as we strive to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We must respect the integrity of individuals and groups even as we witness to Christ in their midst. Christians bear witness in the way in which we love; it is God who converts.

Speaking in Rawalpindi on Tuesday 22nd November 22, 2005 The Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Williams told the Christians that their situation was similar to the boy whose loaves and fishes fed the five thousand (in John 6 v 5-14):

“For us, gathering as a small church in the middle of a society that is mostly not Christian, we think ‘what can we do and what can we give?’ We give our love, we give our compassion to those around us; we give our service and our witness: and the apostles of Jesus Christ say to us ‘Don’t worry; give it to Jesus, he knows what to do with it.’ ”  
“So however small the gifts we feel we are giving, however small the influence we may sometimes feel we may have, give what we have to Jesus and he knows what to do with it. This does not come without cost ... when we offer our service and compassion and step out from the crowd, we don't feel very safe... but it is those acts of generosity where we take a step towards love and compassion that is when Jesus can most use what we give.”

May the faith of Christian in Pakistan uplift them in a spirit of courage, commitment and joy that will enable them to enter into dialogue and build bridges of communication that can create the understanding and mutual respect that will establish tolerance and peace for peoples of all faiths throughout our nation and the world. My prayer is that the Muslim community in Pakistan will come to join us in the common purpose, in turning from heartache to the realization of that hope for peace and harmony.

## **Sharing of Country Perspective: SUDAN**

By Revd Enock Tombe, Provincial Secretary, Episcopal Church of the Sudan, Former General Secretary SCC

### **Brief historical background of the Sudan:**

#### **Before colonial conquest:**

The territories now called the Sudan was occupied by many people from different tribes. Each tribe lived and roamed the land under its control. Some of the tribes had developed their own political systems such as Shilluk in Southern Sudan. The Shilluk had a kingdom. In Northern Sudan there were at least three Nubian Kingdoms which became Christianized between 543 – 1503 AD.

#### **Turkish and Egyptian Rule 1821 – 1884:**

During the Ottoman empire, Turks in alliance with Egyptians invaded and ruled the territories now called the Sudan with its present borders.

#### **Mahdists Rule 1885 – 1898**

A Sudanese Muslim from Northern Sudan declared himself a Mahdi and rose against the Turks. He mobilized a rebellion and eventually chased away the Turks and their Egyptian allies. The Mahdi, actually called Mohamed Ahmed, introduced the first Islamic rule in at least Northern Sudan. His followers are known as Ansar up to today.

#### **British and Egyptian Rule 1899 – 1956**

The British in alliance with Egyptians invaded the Sudan and defeated the Mahdists. The condominium rule then governed the Sudan as a secular state.

#### **Independent Sudan 1956 – now**

The Sudan became an independent state on 1.1.1956 sharing borders with Egypt and Libya in the North; Eritrea and Ethiopia in the East; Kenya and Uganda in the South; and Democratic Republic of Congo, Central Africa Republic and Chad in the West.

#### **Population and Religion:**

Total population is currently estimated around 35 million people. The first census was conducted in 1956. The composition of the people based on ethnic identity were as follows: 61% of African stock, 30% of Arab stock and % of other racial groups (Non-Sudanese). No other proper census was carried out due to the instability in the Sudan. However, the next census is planned for November 2007 in order to prepare the country for elections in 2008 and a referendum in Southern Sudan in 2011 as agreed in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) 2005.

The previous Census of 1956 did not include the question of religious composition of the population. However other impartial censuses especially that of 1983 attempted to address the question of religious affiliation. Generally, it accepted that Muslims form the majority of 70% of the population, Christians are estimated around 25% and the rest (5%) are considered followers of African Traditional beliefs. Muslims are found mostly in Northern Sudan and identify with Arab culture whereas Christians are found mostly in Southern Sudan and identify with African culture in terms of languages and customs.

## **Civil Wars between North and South Sudan**

### **First Civil War 1955 – 1972 (17years)**

Southern soldiers mutinied in Torit, a small town in Southern Sudan in August 1955, just a few months before independence of the Sudan was declared on 1.1.1956. The soldiers refused transfer to the Northern Sudan. The Torit mutiny provided a spark for a total rebellion of the Southern Corps that were stationed in the then three Southern Provinces collectively known as Southern Sudan.

Southerners in general resented the re-colonization of the Southern Sudan by Arab-Muslim Northerners following the departure of the British from the Sudan in 1955.

Southern freedom fighters, organized under different labels fought for separation of the Southern Sudan from Northern Sudan from 1955 up to 1972. Through the mediation efforts of the WCC and AACC under the Emperor Haile-Selassie of Ethiopia. Thus the peace agreement was known as Addis Ababa Peace Agreement 1972.

Southern Sudan then enjoyed regional autonomy from 1972 – 82. In September 1983, the President of the Sudan, General Jaafar Mohamed Numeiri, decreed Islamic laws (Shari'a) all over the country in order to protect his power against both Southern and Northern opposition groups. Hudud sentences were carried out in Khartoum. Thieves had their hands chopped off, adulterers were lashed as well as drunkards. The declaration of Shari'a just fueled a second rebellion in another small Southern town, Bar, on 16th May 1983 by Anya-nya forces that were absorbed into the national army from the first rebellion.

### **Second Civil War 1983 – 2005**

The Southern-based second rebel movement this time called for the creation of a New Sudan of justice, equality and prosperity for all Sudanese regardless of tribe, race, religion or any other label of discrimination. The rebel movement is called Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SDLM) with an armed wing called Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA). The civil war spread this time beyond Southern Sudan to include Northern Sudan territories of Nuba Mountains, Funj and Beja areas in Central and Eastern Sudan respectively as well as the Abyei area.

Through the mediation of IGAD countries led by Kenya under President Daniel Arap Moi and later President Mai Kibaki, with support from USA, UK, Norway and Italy, so-called friends of IGAD, a comprehensive peace agreement (CPA) was signed on 9th January 2005 in Kenya. The CPA gives the Southern Sudan an interim period of six and half years to remain part of the Sudan. At the end of the interim period in 2011, the Southern Sudan people will decide whether to remain part of the Sudan or become an independent state through a referendum.

Three other areas that had joined the rebellion in the Southern Sudan have been granted self-administration status. These areas are Nuba Mountains, Funj (South Blue Nile) and Abyei, with each of them having a separate peace Protocol.

### **Darfur Rebellion 2003 – now**

In February 2003, another rebellion broke out in Darfur region of Western Sudan. Nigeria then offered mediation and there is now a precarious peace agreement reached since May 2006 in Abuja, Nigeria.

However, the war in Darfur is still continuing despite the peace agreement signed. African Peace-keepers have been sent to Darfur by the African Union (AU) but only as monitors - The forces have no mandate to protect civilians caught in the cross-fire between the Western Sudan rebels and Sudan government forces in alliance with Arab Militias known as Janjawed (Devils on Camel Backs, armed with GM3 rifles).

There is a call for UN Peace-keepers but President Bashir has consistently rejected them on the pretext that they will re-colonize the Sudan.

Another civil war almost broke out in Eastern Sudan between Beja Congress and the Sudan Government forces. Thanks to the mediation efforts of Eritrea, there is now a peace agreement between the Beja Congress and Sudan Government.

### **Root Causes of Civil Wars in the Sudan**

The root cause of the civil wars are mainly injustices in power and wealth distribution between the central government in Khartoum and the regions: South, Nuba Mountains, Funj, Eastern Sudan and now Darfur in Western Sudan. The rebellion started in the Southern because it felt marginalization from the centre in terms of power, wealth and identity.

Northern Sudanese elite from riverian Arabized Nubian tribes had been dominating political and economic powers in Khartoum and neglected the different regions of the country. The elite used Islamic religion and Arab Culture as tools for assimilation of the country under the guise of uniting the nation. However, the Sudan

is inhabited by over 500 ethnic groups speaking different languages. The unification policies under Islam and Arabism clashed with the reality of diversity in the Sudan apart from the under-lying exploitation economically and socially of the peoples from the regions.

### **Christian – Muslim Relations**

It is important to note at the outset that Christians and Muslims have never been in conflict at the community level or even as individuals. However, relations between Christians and Muslims have been characterized by State hostility and persecution against the Church.

In 1962, a Missionary Act was passed by the government of General Ibrahim Abud. In 1964, the Abud regime used the 1962 missionary Act to expel foreign Missionaries from Southern Sudan on pretext that they were involved in inciting the first rebellion led by the Anya-nya forces. In 1983, General Jaafar Mohamed Numeiri decreed Shari'a all over the Sudan despite the existing diversity in religions. Between 1900 – 2000 the government under General Hassan Ahmed El Bashir carried out systematic demolition or confiscation of Church property especially in Khartoum under the pretext of town planning. The government also restricted freedom of religion and Christians especially in Northern Sudan. For example, Christian children are required to enter a pre-school before being admitted in primary schools; a pre-school in Northern Sudan means a Koranic School. The Church did not have a capacity to open many Christian pre-schools. Therefore Christian children had no option than to attend a Koranic school in order to qualify for entrance into a primary school.

In the face of state persecution since independence, different Christian denominations came together in January 1965 and formed the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC). The SCC was meant for Christian fellowship, solidarity and ecumenical witness by the member churches. In fact, the SCC initiated the peace process that led to the Addis Ababa Peace agreement of 1972. After the second civil war broke out in 1983, another Council of Churches was created by the Churches in Nairobi to take care of the people under SPLM/A controlled areas while SCC was restricted to operating in government controlled areas during the second civil war. Now the two sister Councils of Churches are in the process of merging this year.

During the war, the SCC through the encouragement of partner Churches abroad and PROCMURA was encouraged to promote inter-religious dialogue with Muslims. The papal visit to Khartoum in 1993 and the visit of the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1995 to Khartoum added to that encouragement. However, it was the effort of the US Centre for Religion and Diplomacy based in Washington that provided the much needed funds to organise an International Conference on Christian-Muslim relations at national level. Amongst its recommendations was the need to establish an independent Council to promote inter-religious dialogue and peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Sudan. In 2003, Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC) was launched in Khartoum and has been in operation up to now.

At denominational level, the Episcopal Church of the Sudan (ECS) has approved the establishment of a Commission for Ecumenical and Inter-faith Relations during the Provincial Synod held in January 2006 in Juba.

Bishop Andudu Elnail has been appointed to lead the Commission. There is an urgent need for funding to enable the Commission get off the ground to build the capacity in each ECS Diocese for inter-religious dialogue and to promote the same at national level together with other churches in the Sudan.

### **Christian-Muslim relations and the protestant churches in Germany**

## 1. The socio-political context

As a long-term result of the age of enlightenment and the ideas of French revolution, state and religion are separate. That's true to most of Europe, yet with a wide range of interpretation what this "separate" means in the political realm. On the one side of the scale we have countries like Italy or Poland with the roman catholic church, especially in its ethical teaching, being highly influential on legislation. On the other extreme there is French laicism, that keeps religion and religious symbolism strictly out of the public realm. Germany is something in between, not only geographically. One of the most precious principle of our constitutional law is religious freedom. The state has to guarantee it and to safeguard both the individual and the collective right, even in its negative form: the right not to believe.

History has provided us with political arrangements that worked so far. Muslim presence forces us to rethink and debate in public issues such as: what is the theological significance of religious communities in a society of western freedom? Or what role should and can religion play in the organizing of public life? Far too long we allowed mass media to be the first ones to jump on the topics involved, fuelling the necessary political discourse with rather heated emotions.

65% of our population are Christians: roman-catholics and protestants being about equal in numbers (25,9 mill / 25,8 mill), followed by 1,2 mill orthodox Christians. 30% have no official religious belonging at all. 5% are members of other religions: with a small number of Jews (0,2 Mill), and 3,2 mill Muslims. That makes up for about 3,8% of the population. Numerically Islam in Germany forms the second biggest Muslim minority in Europe. Or to put it differently: it is the largest minority religion in Europe. More Muslims live in protestant Northern Europe than catholics; and there are more Muslims in catholic southern Europe than protestants. However, compared with the west african setting, the Muslim segment of german population is extremely small. So why on earth are we dealing with that issue?

Because Islamophobia has been a growing phenomenon and it goes hand in hand with xenophobia, the fear of the stranger. In may 2006 2/3 of the polled Germans negated a peaceful coexistence with the Islamic world, 58% fear growing conflicts between Christians and Muslims and 40% wish legal restrictions on the religious practice of Islam in this country[1]. If one flips the coin, Muslims experience discrimination: 57% say, they were discriminated at their working place; 49% feel disadvantaged while looking for appropriate housing; and 48% claimed that applying for a job was more difficult for them than for none-Muslims[2].

Historically speaking, Islam in Germany is a rather new phenomenon. There have been individual Muslims (former prisoners of the Turkish wars, slaves and diplomats) since the 18th century, yet Islam officially arrived in my country (unlike Great Britain or France) with the foreign workers of the late fifties, followed by refugees and asylum seekers. It has been and remains the religion of the foreigners, the strange religion. Only about 1 million Muslims hold german passport (in contrast to Great Britain or the Netherlands where over 50% are citizens which means: they have the right to participate in elections and be elected). In Germany Muslims are less integrated in the political process of decision making. Unlike e.g. Protestants, Catholics or Jews they are not organized as "Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts" and therefore suffer from structural disadvantages: the state doesn't collect religious tax on behalf of them; their representation at communal development plans or media boards depend on good will; Islamic tuition as official subject in public schools structured parallel to protestant or catholic religious teaching is still on the agenda.

At the peak of the cartoon crises, Henryk Broder[3], a well-known Jewish journalist told that joke: "Jesus and Moses are sitting in a café making small talk. Suddenly Jesus stops asking: "By the way, Moses, do you know what happened to Muhammad?" Moses looks around and orders: "Muhammad, two coffee please!" Of course, I would never dare to tell that joke in a dialogue meeting. I am sure, nobody could laugh. But it is very much to the point: Christians and Muslims in german society are not on equal footing. Our social reality is multireligious and multicultural, yet our public awareness and our laws are not. They are biased towards Christian tradition.

To give you just a few examples: The annual opening of parliamentary session always starts with a service. Of course, non-Christians are invited to it as well, but its Christian ecumenical. Christian nuns can wear their habit in public school, female Muslim teachers not. By law (Staatskirchenvertrag) public media stations not only cover various religious affairs, but have to allow for certain programs of Christian religious teaching, yet so far the Islamic community has no equivalent right. Besides two political events, only Christian feasts are public holidays. In some areas public life closes down even at the feast of Mary's Conception or Corpus Christi (although the majority of people have no clue what these feasts mean). Muslims celebrate Id al-fitr, Id al-adhar, Lailat al-qadr or Maulid without public notice. How should public know? All regular stationary calendars indicate only Christian dates, rarely Jewish festivals. Its up to interreligious activities to find out and publish themselves other-religious festival dates.

Our society is multireligious, our awareness is not

## 2.) Interreligious church activities and issues

Many churches, church areas and umbrella organizations have their own special working units and representatives on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations. Church academies host net-works of dialogue-groups, interreligious peace workers or Christian-Muslim couples, they hold seminars, summer-universities or conferences. Some of them have even specialized on this topic.

It's specific to our situation as churches in Germany, that we are engaged in two important, but very different dialogues: the Christian-Muslim, which is at stake here. And the Christian-Jewish, with a much longer and a far more complex historical and theological setting. The two dialogues run parallel - to say the least; more accurate: there was and still is a notion of competition / rivalry between the two: the synods and churches deal with the topics involved in very different ways. We have separate networks for the Christian-Muslim and the Christian-Jewish dialogue. The Evangelischer Kirchentag runs at least two different programs. In the nineties, when the notion of an abrahamic / monotheistic ecumene entered the scene, some dialogue initiatives opened up for discussions among all three monotheistic faiths. At some point there were good chances to weave these different strings of dialogue together, yet, at least on a institutional level, it didn't happen.

For various reasons: Both dialogues are backed by very different pressure groups. Those engaged in it, are torn into opposing solidarities in the political context of the Middle East. And their theological implications run into very different directions: the highly sensitive Christian-Jewish dialogue exposes the anti Judaism of our theological tradition and church history and asks for a re-reading of our own scriptures. At least in a German setting, "antisemitism" means exclusively anti Judaism, leaving aside the other relevant Semitic branch.

What holds long tradition in churches eg of the Middle East, has only recently become good practice in Germany: archdeacons, bishops, or the head of the EKD publicly greet the Muslim community at the end of Ramadan. These greetings are welcomed as a sign of respect to our neighbours in faith, yet they seem to get stuck somewhere in between on their way from top to bottom: local Muslim communities are little aware of them, and local Christian parish churches don't feel called to imitate them.

Mixed seminars for ministers and imams together are held sporadically, which is a promising idea, for both sides: imams learn more about the way, our churches are organized, and the questions, we face right now. And ministers get into contact with local imams

What are the major topics of Christian-Muslim encounter discussed within the churches? It's the building of mosques and the public azan; the head scarf for Muslim women in school and in public life; the establishment of regular Islamic tuition in German language parallel to Protestant, Catholic and Jewish religious teaching; issues of integration, tolerance and its limits; world wide ecumenical awareness and solidarity with Christians in Islamic countries; interreligious marriages and services of blessing; the legitimacy and limits of shared prayer, with both Muslims and Christians been present; sensitivity on Islamic issues within development agencies - just to mention a few topics

## 3.) where are we heading at?

You may have realized/wondered: so far I hardly mentioned theological questions arising from Christian-Muslim encounter. For good reasons.

Of course, our synods and committees discuss theological issues arising from dialogue in diverse sometimes very heated ways. Yet recent theological statements of the churches on Christian-Muslim dialogue tend to get increasingly conservative, dogmatically closed in. That is true to the latest publication of the EKD with the telling title "clarity and good neighbourhood"[4], which awoke strong reactions from our Muslim dialogue partners.

Islamophobia is increasing – and the church communities participate. Secularism is increasing. And we as churches are afraid. As part of European Christianity we suffer from deep crisis. There seems to be an easy way out - In the words of a member of my congregation: "now we have to sell the church building. And all this because of Islam", meaning: it's because of our pluralistic situation, that our churches are empty. It's because of Islam, that Christian teaching has so little relevance any more to people... We know, it's not! Yet there are even church documents that put the diminishing significance of the churches on equal footing with the challenging presence of Islam. It's a common and very dangerous argument: Islam is our enemy again. And "Christian Europe needs to be defended again.

Church theology, the official statements of many of our synods show a closed-in, non-dialogical concept of identity. They define, they wrap up. "Here we go, that's you. And now go, say who you are, reach out to society and respond to their needs!" "Necessity", "responsibility", "implications" - these are words with substantial weight

and significance. But they don't imply reciprocity, they don't breathe, they don't live, they don't taste. Old dark bread, German "Vollkornbrot": very healthy, but not fluffy, lacking the spirit. The whole situation is felt to be a big burden. That's why many of our responses as churches to the interreligious challenges are so late and lack courage: They smell of tiredness. They are half-hearted and fearful.

We meet as Christians and Muslims – but we don't live together. We define – but we don't pray together. We still act as hosts, not as guests sitting at the same table. Because the project of Christian-Muslim dialogue is not rooted in shared spirituality. We are lacking vision, we don't know, what hope drives us, what kind of future we want to expect and work for, as Christians and Muslims together. I think, that's one of the reasons, why dialogue didn't become a movement within our churches.

The birthplace of MODERN Christian-Muslim dialogue has been within the churches. Today an exodus takes place, dialogue seems to become secularized. Just a few indicators: Recently the government established a permanent Islam conference – without participation of the churches. The municipalities initiate interreligious working groups, with the churches being only one among many. That's new to us. And I am not sure where it will lead us to.

1. Institut for opinion research, Allensbach may 2006
2. Halm, Dirk/Sauer, Martina: „Parallelgesellschaft und ethnische Schichtung“; in: APuZ 1-2/2006, 18-24.
3. Der Tagesspiegel, 03.02.2006
4. Klarheit und gute Nachbarschaft. Christen und Muslime in Deutschland, EKD Texte 86, Hannover 2006