



Saksbehandler: Sven Thore Kloster

Saksdokumenter:

United Nations Decade of Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for
Peace (*vedlagt*)

Rapport fra KV om A Common Word (*ettesendes*)

Saker i de økumeniske organisasjonene

Kirkenes Verdensråd (KV)

Forslag til vedtak

Mellomkirkelig råd tar sakene til orientering.



World Council of Churches
Conseil œcuménique des Eglises
Consejo Mundial de Iglesias
Ökumenischer Rat der Kirchen
General Secretariat

Postal address: P.O. Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland
Visiting address: 150 route de Ferney
Phone: (+41-22) 791 61 11
Fax: (+41-22) 791 03 61
General e-mail: infowcc@wcc-coe.org
Website: www.wcc-coe.org

Direct dial: (+41-22) 791.6285
Direct e-mail: dcb@wcc-coe.org
Direct fax: (+41-22) 791.6535

To: WCC Member Churches,
Regional and Associate
Councils,
Christian World Communions,
Specialized Ministries and
International Ecumenical
Organisations

Geneva, 26 March 2009

Dear Friends,

This letter is to draw your attention to promising initiative from the United Nations: a proposal for a **United Nations Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace**.

There is growing acknowledgment within the UN and in the political establishments throughout the world of the increasingly important role played by religious communities and people of faith. We recognize that many situations of injustice and conflict have religious origins or dimensions. At the same time we have seen how interreligious dialogue and cooperation contributes positively to seek justice, resolve conflicts and create opportunities for reconciliation and peace. Within the UN this role of interreligious cooperation has been recognised in a number of recent resolution and initiatives.

Recognizing this trend, in January 2008, the World Council of Churches co-hosted an important interfaith consultation at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. Religious bodies, interfaith organisations and a wide range of faith-based organisations with whom we are in on going dialogue met with representatives of UN agencies and some national government representatives. After careful consideration they agreed that the time is right to propose such an initiative to the UN general assembly. As a result of the work that followed the meeting, in November 2008 the general assembly approved a resolution which requests several UN agencies to work together in facilitating the consideration of such a decade.

The attached proposal (only available in English) outlines the vision and purpose of this effort to deepen and strengthen the partnership between UN member states, UN agencies, religious communities and civil society organisations in order to achieve the culture of peace for which we all yearn and which the world so desperately needs.

Convinced of the importance of this initiative, and having received the affirmation of the WCC executive committee in 2007, I have, on two occasions, discussed this proposal with Ban Ki Moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations. There is clear interest and enthusiasm for considering new forms of partnership in support of the enormous challenges to build peace and secure Justice. I also gave an update to the executive committee at its meeting in 2008.

I attach the proposal for your information and attention. I do so in the hope that you will be alerted to this important initiative, seek the affirmation of your church to the proposal, and that as appropriate you will seek the support of your national government or its agencies towards its approval at the UN general assembly in September 2009.

I would also encourage you to report back to the WCC any results of those actions: i.e. any official support or affirmation of the decade proposal by your church, or by your national government or its agencies. This will help us show the growing international support for this initiative.

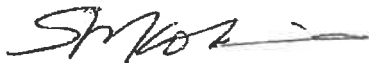
Please direct your report to the WCC United Nations Liaison Office in New York at the address below.

World Council of Churches UNLO
Attention: Rev. Chris Ferguson
111 UN Plaza, Suite 910
New York, NY 10017
USA

Or you may email the UNLO office at this email address: unlo@wcc-coe.org.

I trust that you will be pleased that the WCC has played an important programmatic role in helping bring together diverse religious groups so that we can all together be part of God's vision of a transformed world where peace reigns.

Sincerely yours,



Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

¹Proposal for a
**UNITED NATIONS DECADE
OF INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTERCULTURAL
DIALOGUE, UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION
FOR PEACE**

The UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace 2011-2020 (or DECADE) is aimed at promoting partnership between UN member states, UN agencies as well as religious communities, spiritual movements, organizations representing indigenous traditions and other pertinent value-based civil society organizations to advance sustainable peace.

The DECADE provides a framework to:

1. Encourage individuals and communities of diverse religions and cultures to cooperate in UN initiatives such as: The Millennium Development Goals, enhancement of Human Rights (including the rights of women, children and youth, refugees and migrants as well as gender equity), decent work for all, dialogue among civilizations, promoting a culture of peace and nonviolence, peace-building and shared security.
2. Encourage Member States publicly and constructively to engage individuals and communities of diverse religions and cultures for the common good;
3. Strengthen and deepen the cooperation of individuals and communities of diverse religions and cultures, locally, nationally, regionally and internationally for building a sustainable world of justice and peace;
4. Promote mutual respect and trust between individuals and communities of diverse religions and cultures through dialogue and shared action.

A. Propitious Times for a Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace

There is a growing recognition of the role played by individuals and communities of diverse religions and cultures in all societies. Sadly, many situations of injustice and conflict have religious or ideological origins and dimensions. At the same time, there is also a sense of hope that comes from the development of a number of religious, interfaith and multi-cultural initiatives committed to peace building.

The proposed DECADE will build on *the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010*.

Within the UN the role of Interreligious and intercultural dialogue and cooperation for peace has been clearly expressed in recent resolutions of its General Assembly which promote "*interreligious dialogue*" as well as "*religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation*."² It is worth noting that these resolutions bring "interfaith dialogue and cooperation" into the wider field of "*mutually inclusive and reinforcing initiatives on inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-civilization dialogue and cooperation for peace*," with explicit reference to the "Alliance of Civilizations".

¹ This third draft of the proposal was developed and agreed upon by the representatives of interreligious and faith-based organizations who attended the Consultation hosted by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of NGOs in a Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO), and held at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, Geneva, Switzerland, on 8-11 January 2008. The list of entities represented in the Bossey Consultation is in Annex I. This document is an updated and revised version of the "short version" prepared in June 2008, and revised in for the first time in October 2008.

² See resolutions 61/221 of 20 December 2006 and 62/90 of 17 December 2007.

In this framework a High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace was held by the General Assembly on 4 and 5 October 2007, with participation of organizations of the Civil Society. Two months later, the General Assembly decided "to declare 2010 as the International Year for Rapprochement of Cultures" and recommended that "during the course of the year appropriate events be organized on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace."

More recently, in November 2008, the UN General Assembly approved by unanimity a resolution sponsored by 78 Member States³ which in its paragraph 8: "Requests the Office for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, which plays the focal point role on interreligious, intercultural and intercivilizational matters, to coordinate with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in facilitating consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace"

The chance to build on these UN decisions, in conjunction with mobilizing the immense spiritual, human and organizational resources of the religious communities, spiritual traditions, interfaith organizations and value-based movements, makes this Cooperation for Peace.

B. Main features of the proposed DECADE

1. Actors

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| United Nations | The primary political and programmatic responsibility for sponsorship and implementation of the DECADE will lie with UN Member States and pertinent UN agencies. |
| Coalition | Given the unique focus of the DECADE, religious communities, interfaith and values-based organizations will be given key responsibilities in a participatory approach to implementation, interlinked through an appropriate non-governmental arrangement established by a coalition of these supporting entities. The Coalition partners must subscribe to the principles which inspire the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular respect for freedom of religion or belief and for cultural and religious diversity, and pursuit of a culture of peace. |

2. Expected Functions

The UN Decade of Interreligious Cooperation for Peace would have the following key tasks:

- Design and develop joint programs, projects and activities with people and communities of diverse religions and cultures and other relevant value-based organizations of the civil society, working as partners with pertinent UN agencies and government agencies in the pursuit of relevant United Nations goals, such as: Millennium Development Goals, Enhancement of Human Rights (including the rights of women, children and youth, refugees and migrants as well as gender equity), decent work for all, dialogue among civilizations, promoting a culture of peace and nonviolence, peace-building and shared security;
- Build partnerships between people and communities of diverse religions and cultures and other relevant value-based organizations of the civil society, government agencies and social actors from the private sector, in the pursuit of the above mentioned United Nations goals at global, national and local levels;
- Proactively include women, youth and children in every aspect of the planning and implementation of programs, projects and activities;
- Establish and strengthen relationships of cooperation with the bodies and specialized agencies within the UN system which are responsible for social, cultural, political, economic and environmental concerns.

³ See Resolution A/63/L.24/Rev.2 of 13 November 2008.

- Enhance communication and partnership between religious and political leaders at every level around issues dealing with peace;
- Promote dialogue between people and communities of diverse religions and cultures, and by seeking commonalities and respecting differences, increase mutual understanding and trust;
- Identify the root causes of violence in multireligious and multicultural societies, in order to promote non-violent conflict resolution, justice, tolerance, gender equality and elimination of all forms of religiously and ideologically related injustice, violence and discrimination, leading towards harmonious coexistence between people and communities of diverse religions and cultures;
- Identify, deepen and share the application of sacred texts, teachings –for example, the Golden Rule- and practices that promote mutual respect, cooperation, peace, justice, healing and reconciliation.
- Promote right relations within the human family and with the Earth community.

3. Implementation

The UN Secretary General will identify an appropriate entity of the UN system to serve as Lead Agency for the Decade, as well as invite other pertinent UN agencies and entities to cooperate in its implementation according to their specific mandates. Given the wide spectrum of fields and issues within the UN agenda which might be addressed by the DECADE, a decentralized multi-agency arrangement would be the most appropriate for its implementation.

A “Plan of Action” proposed by the UN Secretary General at the launching of the DECADE will be prepared by the Lead Agency, in consultation with the other cooperating agencies, supporting Member States and pertinent civil society partners organized themselves in the Coalition. The Millennium Development Goals, Human Rights, Culture of Peace, Dialogue among Civilizations, climate change, peace-building and shared security appear to be the main pertinent themes in the current agenda of the United Nations to be considered in a plan of action for the DECADE.

It should be borne in mind that there are a large number of relevant programs and activities already being undertaken by religious and interfaith organizations around the world in the field of interreligious and intercultural dialogue and cooperation for peace. Consequently, a Plan of Action should benefit from that experience, while adopting a flexible approach which would allow a high degree of initiative and participation by the partner organizations during the implementation of the DECADE.

4. Time Frame

The DECADE would cover the period 2011-2020, launched on the 21st of September 2010, the International Day of Peace, which would then be an annual occasion to promote the Decade’s objectives, assess the progress made, and strengthen Interreligious and intercultural partnership and commitment. The launch date of the Decade would also correspond with the UN International Year of Rapprochement of Cultures.

Given this proposed launch date, there would be sufficient time to prepare and promote a final proposal and to get political support from member states to present the corresponding project of resolution on the DECADE and to have it adopted by the General Assembly in its 64th session (autumn 2009). During this preparatory phase the Coalition of supporting organizations will be constituted and an appropriate non-governmental arrangement will be designed and put in place to insure the effective mobilizing of individuals and communities of diverse religions and value-based organizations for their participation in the DECADE.

Annex I

Participants at the Bossey Consultation

The following entities attended the Bossey Consultation - held at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, Geneva, Switzerland, on 8-11 January 2008 - to consider a proposal in support of a UN Decade for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation. This draft proposal is endorsed only by those representing interfaith and faith-based organizations:

Host Organizations

The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO)

Interfaith organizations

Committee of Religious NGOs at the United Nations; CONGO's Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns (Geneva) – CSVGC; The Council for the Parliament of World's Religions – CPWR; Interfaith International; Interfaith Encounter Association – IEA; International Association for Religious Freedom - IARF; Minorities of Europe; The Temple of Understanding: United Religions Initiative – URI; World Conference on Religion for Peace – WCRP

Faith based communities and organizations

Armenian Orthodox Church; Baha'i International Community; FOCOLARI Movement (Roman Catholic); Rissho Koseikai (Buddhist); Lama Gangchen World Peace Foundation; Lutheran World Federation; Orthodox Centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate; Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies (Jordan); Saint Egidio Community (Roman Catholic); Sikh Dharma International; Spiritual Appeal Group of Geneva; Spiritual University Brama Kumaris; Union of Superiors General of Men (USG) and Woman (UISG) Religious of the Roman Catholic Church; World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC); World Council of Arya Samaj; The World Islamic League; World Vision International; Women's World Summit Foundation (WWSF)

UN Member States and observers

Chile, Italy, Kazakhstan, Philippines, Romania and Russian Federation. The Holy See.

United Nations agencies and departments

DESA – Department for Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Secretariat; ILO – International Labor Office; OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; UNDP – United Nations Development Fund, and UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Annex II

Provisional Steering Committee for the DECADE

The representatives from interfaith and faith-based organizations and communities present at the Bossey Consultation designated some of them as "Provisional Steering Committee" which will oversee the process aimed at having the proposed DECADE eventually adopted by the UN General Assembly. This committee is being chaired by Stein Villumstad (WCRP), based in New York, having Trevor Davies, Chair of the CONGO's Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns (CSVGC-Geneva), based in Geneva, as Deputy-Chairperson.

As soon as the Coalition will be formally established (March 2009), their partner organizations will be requested to either ratify the Provisional Steering Committee (which would cease to be "provisional") or designate a new one.

For more information on this initiative or for expressing your support, please visit www.faihddecadeforpeace.net or contact the Coordinator, Dr. Gerardo Gonzalez, e-mail: decade@vtr.net

**Rapport fra den andre intrakristne konsultasjonen i Genève om oppfølging av A
Common Word (ACW) og kristen selvforståelse i møte med islam, 29.-31.03.2009**
v/ Sven Thore Kloster

Fra søndag 29. til tirsdag 31. mars samlet KV 13 fagpersoner og kirkelige representanter på det økumeniske instituttet Bossey for å drøfte kristen selvforståelse i møte med islam og videre oppfølging av ACW. Fra Norge deltok undertegnede og Oddbjørn Leirvik. Møtet var en oppfølging av den større intrakristne konsultasjonen i Genève i oktober 2008 hvor alle de 13 også hadde deltatt.

Møtet var dessverre preget av en del forvirring. Dels fordi anbefalingene/sluttdokumentet fra møtet i oktober ikke var offentliggjort eller gitt noen status, og dels fordi ingen fra KV kunne forklare hva som var hovedformålet med dette siste møtet og hvordan det evt. skulle relatere seg til det forrige.

Tross sviktende bestilling fra KV tolket møteforsamlingen sitt eget mandat til å være å fortsette refleksjonen fra oktober, og bidra med ideer for hvordan KV framover kan arbeide med kristen selvforståelse i møte med islam og med kristen-muslimsk dialog på et globalt nivå. Mesteparten av tiden gikk med til spennende diskusjoner og gruppearbeid, se vedlagte grupperapporter (deles ut på AU-møtet). Den ene omhandler behovet for studiemateriell og ber KV ta initiativ til å utvikle kontekstuell bibelstudiemateriell ut fra et religionsdialogisk perspektiv. Den andre er et mer generelt refleksjonsnotat om kontekstuell teologi i møte med (evt. sammen med) islam. Hvilken status grupperapportene har, og i hvilken grad/på hvilket nivå KV vil følge dem opp, er ikke avklart.

På grunn av den store forskjellen i holdninger til muslimer og interreligiøs dialog i den økumeniske familien, er det kanskje ikke så rart at KV har opptrådt litt nølende i responsen til ACW. Nå etter siste konsultasjon virker det som om KV har fokusert på tre spor i den videre oppfølgingsprosessen til ACW. For det første utfordret KV i brevet "Learning to explore love together" fra mai 2007 medlemskirkene sine til å respondere til ACW og følge opp brevet i sine nasjonale kontekster. For det andre har KV satt i gang en prosess om kristen selvforståelse i møte med islam. Møtene i Genève i oktober 2008 og mars 2009 må sees som viktige initiativ i denne prosessen. For det tredje planlegger også KV å ta initiativ til en serie kristen-muslimske konsultasjoner på internasjonalt nivå. Den første av disse planlegges arrangert på høsten 2009, men pga. den finansielle situasjonen til organisasjonen er det ennå ikke endelig avklart.

Selv om KVs manglende åpenhet og strategi ble tydelig for deltakerne på møtet, var det alt i alt en spennende konsultasjon hvor det skjedde mye verdifull utveksling av ideer og bekjentskap.

Oslo, 1. april 2009

Doing contextual theology in dialogue with Muslims

Many documents have been produced within the World Council of Churches about Christianity's relation to other faiths (including the not formally adopted document "Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding", 2005). There is, however, a lack of documents that deals more specifically with our relation with Muslims and to Islam. There is also a need for theological reflection that addresses concrete challenges in different contexts.

CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

When leaning on the notion of *contextual theology*, we need to clarify what we mean by that. Since in the age of globalization local and global contexts are increasingly interwoven, we don't look for a plurality of localized theologies. It is rather a matter of how different theological outlooks can inform and enrich each other, by being sensitive to the complexities of context.

... IN DIALOGUE WITH MUSLIMS

Reflecting on the possibility of doing contextual theology *in dialogue with Muslims*, we also need to clarify what kind of theological relationship we are talking about. Do we mean by that

- doing contextual theology *in relation to Islam* (focusing on Christian self-understanding in different contexts, vis-à-vis friendly or more confrontational expressions of Islam);
- doing contextual theology *in our relationship with Muslims* (exploring the work of the Spirit in the space between Christians and Muslims); or
- doing contextual theology *together with Muslims* (jointly discussing common ethical and theological issues, even taking theological action together)?

CHRISTIAN SELF-UNDERSTANDING

While considering new ways of engaging theologically with Muslims, many Christians would still think that the question of Christian self-understanding is even more pressing and that the churches need much more preparation before they can proceed in ethical and theological dialogue with Islam. In some contexts it will also be difficult to find Muslim partners who are prepared to engage theologically with Christians.

In terms of Christian self-understanding, doing contextual theology means critical and creative interaction between context-specific experiences on the one hand and theological self-reflection on the other.

In an intra-Christian perspective, the reality of contradictory approaches to Islam within the Christian family must also be taken seriously. Dialogical tendencies compete with renewed forms of Christian polemics against Islam, as seen in Christian movements associated with the globalized New Christian Right and even in some of the historical churches.

In minority contexts, one of the questions that arise is whether Christian theology should be reactive or active. Whereas a reactive theology might often seem like a “theology of survival”, a more active and open-ended approach would rather (in tune with *A Common Word*) seek to formulate a “theology of love”. Faced with Christian migration from Muslim majority societies, the self-searching question has been raised whether there is in fact an ongoing “migration of the mind” from contexts that are culturally and politically dominated by Islam. What is needed is a theological ground that allows for taking new steps not away from but towards the other, even when under perceived pressure.

What would a theology of being a minority look like? And would it be possible to engage with Muslims in joint ethical and theological reflection about minority experiences?

WHAT IS SPECIAL WITH CHRISTIANITY’S RELATION TO ISLAM?

When considering what it means to do theology in a dialogical relationship with Muslims, the question arises of whether there is something special with Christianity’s relation to Islam. Some would say *no*: In theological terms, there is nothing essentially different in our relation to Islam. What is needed is further reflection on the general question of God’s presence outside the confines of Christianity. Others would say *yes*: as the children of Abraham we share theological space with Jews and Muslims. It’s also true that Islam is the only religion that from the outset addresses Christianity directly (as Christianity has addressed Judaism). Can we, as Christians, continue doing theology while simply ignoring the fundamental questions from the Jewish or Muslim side (“what do you say about Jesus”)?

In the East, Islam has always been part of the horizon of theologizing. To avoid misunderstandings of the doctrine of Trinity Middle Eastern churches have added “one God” to the liturgical formula “in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. In some churches, one will nevertheless find a historical reservation towards doing theology together with Muslims (while affirming moral bonds and the virtues of coexistences). Even in such contexts, however, theological questions may often break the surface in everyday communication.

Now the challenge from Islam has come to Western theology as well. In all contexts, a central challenge is to do Christian theology in ways that responds to Muslim concerns. In this process, Christian theology (with Christology at its center) is not leveled out but is rather given the opportunity of becoming more focused and transparent.

TAKING JOINT THEOLOGICAL ACTION, IN RELATION TO CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES?

A Common Word is formulated as invitation to Christians to engage in joint ethical and theological reflection for the common good. ACW do not, however, address concrete challenges arising from different contexts in which (for instance) Christians and Muslims might either be in a minority or a majority position. But when trying to do contextual theology together, we need also to connect local and global experiences. Whereas in some national contexts Christians do ~~not~~ feel that they don't have equal citizenship with Muslims, the global context is deeply affected by new political and military actions that have recently been taken by the West in (by many perceived as against) the Muslim world.

When problems arise in local contexts because of power imbalances related to religious affiliation, is it possible to think of Christians and Muslims *taking joint ethical and theological action* on critical issues? When for instance the question is raised (as in Malaysia) of whether Christians should be allowed to use the name Allah, would Christian and Muslim theologians be ready to speak out together on that issue? With a view to ACW's deep linkage between love of God and love of the neighbor: Is it thinkable that Christians and Muslims develop together a humanizing theological ethics which has protection of the vulnerable human being as its bottom line?

HOW TO OVERCOME IDEALISTIC REPRESENTATIONS

In theological conversation, as Christians and Muslims we seem often to focus more on *idealistic representations* of our respective religions than on how they are actually lived in practice. Expressions such as "that is not Islam" or "that is not what Christianity teaches" may blur embarrassing realities and block a critical conversation about troubling aspects of our traditions.

Just beneath the surface of or ideal representations there is may also be a sense of mutual resentment, nourished by troubled experiences and inherited stereotypes of the other. How can these sentiments be unpacked and dealt with in an atmosphere of love?

Historical sins and current fears lead us to realize that we can hardly do theology together unless we repent together, in each others' presence.

PUTTING UP THEOLOGICAL BARRIERS AGAINST GENERALIZATIONS

One of the difficult challenges before us is how to build up moral and hermeneutical *barriers against generalizations* about the others. In many contexts, generalizations about how Muslims, Christians, and Jews "really are" seem to be endemic. Such generalizations are often culturally embedded but may also be supported by stereotypical readings of our Scriptures or by inherited polemics from the theological traditions (for instance, misrepresentations of Islam in medieval Christianity). Several aspects of the current situation reinforce the conflict-dimensions of our religions – in real or perceived clashes between "Christians and Muslims", "Christianity and Islam", "Muslims and the West", etc.

To avoid generalizing misuse of what the Scriptures say about the religiously other, what is said about other faiths in the New Testament and in the Qur'an should be read in a

historical-contextual perspective. While realizing that critical hermeneutics is controversial in many theological circles, can Christian and Muslim theologians still support each other in a hermeneutically grounded warning against generalizations? Can we also speak out together against movements within our religions that seem actually to corroborate prevalent stereotypes (e.g. of the other trying always to take control in the name of religion)?

THE QUESTION OF MORAL ALLIANCES AND THE REALITY OF CROSS-RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES

In spite of widespread stereotypes, in many contexts there is also a strong legacy of mutual trust. In many parts of the world, Christians and Muslims share more or less the same cultural sentiments and may also articulate their moral convictions in a similar language. Again, this varies with context.

A more recent phenomenon is that of *moral alliances* on the political scene. We see examples of conservative Christians and conservative Muslims engaging each other in defense of traditional family values, against the perceived dangers of modern individualism (examples could be cited from national contexts such as Russia and of interreligious alliance building in the context of the United Nations). In some cases, the device might seem to be: "We don't want to take about theology, let's confront modernity and secular values together".

On the other hand, there are also examples of other Muslims engaging other Christians in defense of liberal values, including the rights of women. In many contexts, we also see that Christians and Muslims jointly adopt a human rights-oriented language which is radically different from the language that is used when secularity is posed as a threat to religious values.

Where will the complex realities cited above lead us in the future? Will we see more examples of cross-religious alliances, either with a conservative or a liberal tendency? Although simplified labels as "conservative" and "liberal" are not always helpful, the question remains of how we reflect ethically and theologically on deep differences that cut right across religious divides.

ECUMENICAL CONVERSATION AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The latter question leads to second one: What is, after all, the difference between ecumenical and interreligious dialogue about moral issues, given the fact that differences within the religions are often just as hard to tackle as those between religions? And can we see similar examples of cross-religious differences in terms of theology?

With regard to theological differences, we need to realize that many questions that Muslims are not afraid to ask (for instance about incarnation and trinity), are quite similar to questions that many Christians struggle with but seldom dare to voice. In this way, the frank questions that Muslims ask to Christian theology may in fact lead to a deeper reflection on our faith in the incarnate Christ. Correspondingly, an open exposure to

Christian theology may lead to deepened reflection among Muslims on difficult issues in Islamic theology.

The questions raised above are examples of challenging experiences that call for joint ethical and theological exploration. There are, however, just as many positive points of departure for doing theology together, for instance in relation to our image of God or our religious experiences.

THEOLOGICAL METHODOLOGIES

In terms of methodology, it seems not possible in all contexts to engage in open and critical conversation about moral and theological issues. Such spaces need to be created, as it has been done not only in Christian theological institutions in the West who have included Muslim scholars as faculty members but also in Muslim theological faculties that have opened up for academic dialogue with Christians in countries such as Turkey and Indonesia. (In the latter cases, we can also see how the state has played an important role in developing spaces for critical theological explorations.) Exchange of teachers and researchers between Christian and Muslim theological institutions have proved to open new opportunities for doing theology together and should be further developed.

When contemplating what doing theology together might mean, we are not only referring to more or less professional forms of theological reasoning. The most pressing challenge is to find forms of talking about love of God and love of the other (the central themes in *A Common Word*) which may engage the ordinary believer. In that respect, some Christians and Muslims have found the concept and methodology of “scriptural reasoning” rewarding. In scriptural reasoning, believers explore their sacred scriptures together in relation to shared challenges, and with the aim of making deep reasoning public. However, in some contexts such practices seem not be possible (or even desirable). In some places, many Muslims won’t relate to the Bible at all; Christians are not supposed by Muslims to touch the Qur’an, and the Christians themselves have similar reservations against engaging in serious conversation about the holy book of Islam.

The example demonstrates that any attempt at doing theology together must be context sensitive. It must also be sensitive with regard to what is seen as the central forms of communication in different Christian and Muslim traditions. In many contexts, theological dialogue in the spiritual framework of mysticism (or joint reflections on spiritual experience) might be a more natural option than scriptural reasoning.

THE QUESTION OF THE CROSS

In any effort at doing theology in dialogue with Islam, we must be true to the central tenets of our Christian faith. For instance, *the question of the cross* might often seem to be left in the background when theologies of religion are articulated. In a Christian understanding, the cross reveals a central aspect of being configured to Christ. What does it mean to be configured with Christ in a theology of love, in our relation to Islam and in our relationship with Muslims?

GROUP 1

Provision of educational material linked to Christian self-understanding in relation to Islam

We acknowledge the need for educational and study material to assist Christians in reflecting on their own self understanding, in relation to Islam and taking account of the wide variety of contexts in our world in which Christian and Muslims engage together.

We are aware of the variety of theological documents that the WCC has produced over a number of decades in relation to Christian engagement with people of other faiths. However often these have been in the form of reports or academic theological statements, or not specifically related to Christian-Muslim engagement, which offers particular opportunities and challenges. We are also aware that the 21st century has in itself offered a new context for Christian-Muslim relations. We believe that there is a place for the provision of a different kind of material, which draws together academic credibility and grassroots experience, which is written using an overtly educational methodology, and which takes account of the contemporary world context.

Such study material can take a number of different forms, and the role of the WCC will be different in each case. For example, it is useful to provide 'courses' on Islam, or on inter faith relations which take account of their geographical context or particular ecclesial perspectives. But many churches and regional organisations already do offer such material, and there is no point in the WCC duplicating material that is already available. Rather in such cases, we would suggest that the WCC has a role in creating and publicising via its website a 'catalogue' of such material that is available for Christians to use. It might well be that the WCC also could be involved in helping to translate good quality material that is available in minority languages.

We do however feel that there is a case for a small scale resource (a booklet rather than a book) developed by the WCC (possibly in association with the Christian World Communion) which would offer some sample Bible Studies – in which the text is overtly explored from the perspective of Christian Muslim engagement. Given both the role of the Bible within Christian self-understanding and the different ways that different Christian traditions use and interpret the Bible we believe that such a biblical resource would fit well with the WCC's role in assisting the Churches to reflect on their unity and diversity as part of the Christian family. By using the Bible as a point of departure the study material will have a broad appeal to diverse Christian communities. We also believe that given the WCC's expressed desire to engage with the evangelical constituency the provision of Bible Studies is one way that such ecumenical-evangelical relationships can be strengthened.

We are concerned about the resources (both of personnel and finance) that the WCC will have to take forward this project, given the pressure of work on WCC staff working in this area, so our suggestion below has to be tentative until this is clarified. But:

- We encourage the WCC to produce study material which provides different contextual readings of some biblical texts.
- We have tried to map out a few texts which could be used in the study material 'booklet'. These texts are not usually considered dialogical texts, but carry in them (hopefully) a surprising potential for inter-religious encounters:

Ex 3 + John 4 – reflect on God's different names (I am...)

Revelation 21 – reflect on the inclusion of the kings of the world
Genesis 14 – reflect on Melkisedek’s blessing of Abraham
Genesis 32 – 33 – the encounter of Jacob and Esau
John 1 – The Prologue of John’s Gospel

- The interpretations/text commentaries should present readings from the wide spectrum of global Christianity
- The WCC should appoint an editorial group with representation from the Christian World Communions who identify different grass root interpretations of the suggested texts. It will be important to ensure a proper ‘dialectic’ between experiential input, academic insights and the ecclesial framework offered by the different churches.
- The different contributors should be asked to encounter the Biblical text with questions like “how does this text provide meaning to your Christian self-understanding in relation to your encounter with Muslims?”
- The editorial group will put together these different interpretations to make a study material which also includes questions for further reflection in the congregations.
- The publication could also contain fine art and other non-verbal resources. Websites like these ones could be used:
www.presenceandengagement.org.uk
www.asianchristianart.org
www.jesusmafa.com
www.textweek.com

We suggest that use is made of WCC meetings to ensure wide distribution of the resource. We also suggest that a sample of the booklet is trialled at this autumn’s meeting of the General Secretaries of the CWCs.

Other possible texts:

Mark 7,24 The Syro-Phoenician woman
Luke 15 ?
Hagar and Ishmael
The story of Joseph
More to be added...

Appendix One

This takes the text of John 4 and notes where in the story

- a) Issues raised in the Listeners Report from the October 2008 consultation appear in the story. Presented in **BOLD**.
- b) Where specific issues relating to Christian-Muslim theological and practical engagement could be drawn out. Presented in *ITALICS*.

Please note that this is NOT intended as an example of the 'finished product'. It is rather a sample (for the current 'academically orientated' group) of how such a text repays attention in relation to the topics under discussion.

John 4

Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman

1 The Pharisees heard that Jesus was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. 3 When the Lord learned of this, he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

4 Now he had to go through Samaria. *Comparison between the Jewish/Samaritan dynamic with the Christian/Muslim dynamic often made by Christian scholars. Sense of being both 'near' and 'far'.* 5 So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. *Note link of time and Jesus' situation with the Cross 'I thirst'. Story not obviously linked to Cross – but this provides an oblique connection. How can Christians engage with Muslims in reflecting on the importance of the cross for Christianity – does this oblique way provide a pattern?*

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" 8 (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) *Role of women – and the social mores – the woman is an outsider in her community. How do Christianity and Islam define what is a 'good' woman? Our traditions inspire us to show love for our neighbour as a representative of the presence of Jesus Christ, regardless of race, religion or gender*

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.[a]) *Social tensions between Christians and Muslims – perhaps particularly in contexts where Christians are the poorest members of society with the most menial jobs eg Pakistan where Christians are toilet cleaners and road sweepers. Treated as 'unclean'. At various times, Christians have looked on Muslims as 'other' in different ways: partner, friend, neighbour, stranger, rival, even 'enemy', some of these helping dialogue, others hindering it. Our relationships with Muslims have been mixed, and have been qualified by mutual respect and cooperation, but also mutual oppression and persecution.*

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." *Engagement with the 'other' becomes possible in relationship to basic shared human physical need – in this case for water.*

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" 12 "Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" *Christians and Muslims have shared tradition of figures from biblical history.*

We are each drawn closer to God through our own communal life and tradition. We recognise the diversity and richness of attitudes among Christians and know the importance of heeding questions raised by people from different places, circumstances and generations, especially the young.

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." *Both Christianity and Islam have deep sense of the importance of spirituality. Eg Rabia. Also importance of Christian sacraments for*

Christians eg baptism. What does baptism say to us about our self identity and also our engagement with the 'other'?

Christians are constantly renewed by the process of dialogue; which helps explain why we welcome the invitation of "A Common Word"

Our traditions help us to perceive the loving God in creating, incarnational, salvific and pneumatological terms

15The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

16He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

17"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. 18The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

19"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. *Woman chooses a title for Jesus that makes sense to her from her Samaritan context that is not fully adequate – but is accepted and provides the basis for ongoing dialogue. What does this say for Christian-Muslim engagement? We recognise the virtue of patient listening, and look on dialogue as an aspect of spirituality. We have learnt the need for sensitivity in dialogue with Muslims especially in areas of vocabulary, and when referring to key terms such as mission, witness and conversion.* 20Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." *Sense of competition between Christianity and Islam – over holy places, holy books etc.*

We are each drawn closer to God through our own communal life and tradition

21Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. *The specificity and particularity of our Christian faith – and its roots is important and cannot be overlooked.*

23Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. **As Christians we often find ourselves in a critical relationship with our own traditions, and can also find ourselves growing in commitment to our own traditions** 24God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." *Could this be 'translated' to suggest that there will come a time when the 'divisions' between the faiths could be overcome. What does it actually mean to worship God in spirit and in truth? Our Christian self-understandings are challenged and deepened by our relations with Muslims. We acknowledge the need for different theological approaches in different contexts.*

25The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." *In these three verses we have the Trinity presented – how to draw this out – what does it imply for our conversation with Muslims?*

Our self-understanding as Christians is defined by our relationship with God as Trinity as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

26Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he." *'I am: the one speaking with you'. Claim of divine name by Jesus for the first time in the Gospel – but linked to being in conversation/ relationship with the 'other'. Also there is a sense in which 'I am' is not totally graspable.*

The Disciples Rejoin Jesus

27Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

28 Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,
29 "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ[b]?" 30 They
came out of the town and made their way toward him.

31 Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something."

32 But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

33 Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?"

34 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do
you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at
the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he
harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.

**Christians thrive upon the fertile tension between theological reflection and living in
diverse contexts with Muslims**

37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have
not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their
labor."

Many Samaritans Believe

39 Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony,
"He told me everything I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to
stay with them, and he stayed two days. 41 And because of his words many more became
believers.

42 They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we
have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

*Relation between mission and dialogue – the Samaritans take the initiative to invite Jesus
based on the woman's testimony. What does it mean in the Christian-Muslim context to call
Jesus 'Saviour of the World'? Are women's roles in inter faith engagement always
adequately valued?*

**Our traditions help us to perceive the loving God in creating, incarnational, salvific and
pneumatological terms**

INTRA-CHRISTIAN CONSULTATION ON CHRISTIAN SELF-UNDERSTANDING TO ISLAM

1. A sense of who we (Christians) are in relation to Muslims

- Our self-understanding as Christians is defined by our relationship with God as Trinity as revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- Our traditions help us to perceive the loving God in creating, incarnational, salvific and pneumatological terms
- We are each drawn closer to God through our own communal life and tradition
- Our traditions inspire us to show love for our neighbour as a representative of the presence of Jesus Christ, regardless of race, religion or gender
- Our Christian self-understandings are challenged and deepened by our relations with Muslims
- As Christians we often find ourselves in a critical relationship with our own traditions, and can also find ourselves growing in commitment to our own traditions
- At various times, Christians have looked on Muslims as 'other' in different ways: partner, friend, neighbour, stranger, rival, even 'enemy', some of these helping dialogue, others hindering it
- Our relationships with Muslims have been mixed, and have been qualified by mutual respect and cooperation, but also mutual oppression and persecution
- Christians are constantly renewed by the process of dialogue; which helps explain why we welcome the invitation of "A Common Word"
- Christians thrive upon the fertile tension between theological reflection and living in diverse contexts with Muslims

2. When Christians interact with Muslims they have drawn upon a variety of resources. In our time when relations between Christians and Muslims are particularly urgent these resources require intentional re-formulation

- We have long recognised the importance of specialists in the study of Islam as Muslims live and present it, and the need to educate leaders and communities in the knowledge of Islam. Learning from the lessons of the past is important for future relations.
- We acknowledge the need for different theological approaches in different contexts
- We recognise the virtue of patient listening, and look on dialogue as an aspect of spirituality. We have learnt the need for sensitivity in dialogue with Muslims especially in areas of vocabulary, and when referring to key terms such as mission, witness and conversion.

- We recognise the diversity and richness of attitudes among Christians and know the importance of heeding questions raised by people from different places, circumstances and generations, especially the young.
- We recognise the value of resources from outside our own faith (including Islam) in constructing welcoming and diverse communities.

3. Steps for Further Reflection

Through this consultation we have discerned the need to

1) encourage our communities to

- know Islam better by listening carefully to how Muslims express themselves
- we encourage our communities to: understand better God's invitation to us to be good neighbours to one another, and to extend this neighbourliness to Muslims.
- equip ourselves to bear appropriate witness to “the hope that is in us”

2) work together ecumenically to

- continue our exploration of such important questions as Trinity and Salvation in relation to Islam, and the relationship between witness, mission, dialogue and living together in right relationship
- continue network-building within the resources of this consultation body, and we invite our WCC and CWC colleagues actively to explore ways of facilitating this

3) work with Muslims on issues such as

- Religion and State, human rights
- Relationship of religious identity to land or territory
- Concepts of secularism, pluralism, citizenship
- Further collaboration on such issues as social and economic justice, climate change, peace, healing of memories
- Conversion
- Use of religious symbols for political ideologies, religiously motivated violence, gender justice and human sexuality
- What it means to encounter one another
- How interreligious dialogue contributes to deepening contextual theology
- The common challenge to hand on the legacy of faith to coming generations