

# ISLAM – Religion of Violence or Peace?

## Reflections concerning the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001

By Dr. Christine Schirmacher, Bonn/Germany

*Christine Schirmacher (born 1962), M.A., Dr. phil. (Ph.D.), in Islamic Studies at the State University of Bonn, Germany, is married to Thomas Schirmacher, mother of two children and lecturer of Islamic Studies at Martin Bucer Seminary Bonn and Hamburg and professor and head of the department of Islamic studies at Whitefield Theological Seminary, Lakeland, Florida. As head of the Islam Institute of the Lausanne Movement Germany, she gives Islam seminars at churches and secular organisations. Christine Schirmacher is author of a two volume standard introduction to Islam, as well as of books and numerous articles published in German, English, French and Dutch magazines. Conference lectures and study trips led her to many Muslim countries like Iran, Syria and Egypt as well as to Africa. Her major fields of research are Islamic fundamentalism, the political system of Islam, folk Islam, human rights in Islam, comparative Islam and Christianity, and Shiite Islam.*

After the acts of terrorism in New York and the menace of further planned acts in Europe and the United States, we are asked to take a stand as to how we see Islam. People are shaken and helpless in the face of these events. Why in the world would someone do something like this!? Is Islam a religion that teaches violence? Or are these deeds just the wrongdoing of some fanatic terrorists, who take Islam as a misunderstood excuse for their actions?

It is perfectly justified when people emphasize that we should not make THE Muslims as such responsible or suspect them for the acts of terrorism in general. Panic, prejudice and discrimination, as well as looking only into one direction, will not help us to understand the background. During this time it is very important to continue considering our unpolitical, peaceful Turkish neighbour as our companion and fellow citizen, and not regard him as an enemy. Many Muslims themselves have condemned the acts of terrorism.

Turkey and Germany have traditionally good relationships throughout the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Germany has had a few “colonies”, but has never been a colonial power as France or England for example has been, so wounds from the past may be not so deep in respect to Germany, as maybe in respect to some other countries. And, Turkish Islam is in many aspects less political than Arabic Islam. Most Turkish Muslims live an unpolitical life.

And then we can not speak of THE Muslims, just as we can not say THE Christians. The majority of the Muslims, i. e. 90%, are Sunni Muslims, 8-9% are Shi'ite, followed by several smaller groups such as the Alawites, Druze, Yezidis, Ahmadiyya, Baha'ì or the Ahl-i haqq. Their dogmas and beliefs differ strongly from each other and from orthodox Sunni Islam.

In Germany, Islam is predominantly Turkish and most Turks adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam. Of 3.3 Mill. Muslims in Germany about 2.1 Mill. are of Turkish descendancy (including minorities like the Kurds, Armenians etc.). Turkish Islam differs very much from Arabic or Iranian Islam, not only, but also because of the official separation of religion and state in Turkey. And last, not least, the majority of all Muslims worldwide does not live in the Arabic countries of the Near East, but in Southeast Asia, in Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

## Peaceful and violent passages in the Qoran

The Qoran contains verses that speak of peace, peacemaking, forgiveness, and of God's grace, although these verses deal mostly with peace among Muslims themselves (49,10) or with peace that the (Muslim) believer will find in paradise. (56,26; 15,47).

Other Qoran texts speak of violence and even command it: „O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and be stern with them. Hell will be their home – a hapless journey's end!“ (surah 66,9 and others). The unanswered question is, to whom this command

of violence is directed to and at what time or under what circumstances it should be applied to.

Concerning this question there is a broad variety of different opinions among Muslim theologians: There are those who are totally against violence and refer to verses in the Qoran that speak of a (peaceful) call to the Muslim faith, and there are those who think that after a certain period of peaceful testifying they may also imply methods of combat against the „unbelievers“. Then there are also groups that want to turn the structures of the Western World upside down, obtaining the same rights as the Christian churches, but would reject to use violence for their targets.

Another problem is that Islam does not know of any highest authority which is entitled to speak for all or most Muslims, and it does not have any written confession, nor any gremium, council or credo that defines and specifies what is considered to be “Islamic” or “non-Islamic” which would be accepted by the majority or all of the Islamic groups.

## **Muslims in Germany**

The majority of the Muslims in Germany live and think unpolitically. But among the Turkish Muslims there are also extremist Islamic groups that are under observation of the German state. But for the majority of the Muslims, Islam is above all a religion and a way of life, a combination of religion, culture and traditions (religious laws, feasts and holidays). Many Turkish Muslims are secularized and hardly follow the „Five Pillars“ of the Muslim faith (confession of faith, five daily prayers, fasting, almsgiving, pilgrimage to Mecca).

## **Islamism in Germany**

For islamistic groups represented in Germany and all over Europe, Islam has a political as well as a social dimension, which they hope to proclaim worldwide, also in Europe. Their goal is to infiltrate society with their own laws and values, by achieving equal rights with other religious groups before the law, by getting official recognition of Islam as the third biggest religious group and claiming and making use of all the freedom Western law guarantees to live their lives according to the cultural und religious values of Islam with the goal to change Western society into an Islamic society. These groups are under observation by the German state, because they express in their deeds and words their wish to create a new State according to the principles of Qoran and „sunna“ (Muhammed’s way of living, his decisions and opinions on various issues as they are reported in the traditions, the “hadith”), which so clearly differ from the main ideas and values of a free democracy, that these groups are considered enemies of democracy by the German state. Some terrorist groups have already had their clashes and confrontations with German state authorities.

## **The teaching of „Djihad“**

The arabic word „dijihad“ does not actually mean „Holy War“, but „to make an effort“, “to strive”, i. e., to make an effort to spread Islam and the truth of the message of the Qoran – as Muslims see it - on God’s path. This „effort on the path of God“ or „effort for the sake of God“ (arab. jahada fi sabil allah) can be interpreted to be a peaceful proclamation of Islam as well as war or conflict.

## What does the Qoran teach about Djihad?

The Qoran uses the word „djidah“ in several places. The meaning of “djidah” can vary as to the time when it is used. In the “Meccan period”, that is the early period of Islam and the years of Muhammad’s first prophecies, about 610-622 AD, when he still lived in his hometown Mecca, the emphasis of the term “djidah” lays on a peaceful proclamation of Islam. During this early period, Muhammad was desperately struggling for recognition and could not even think of the possibility of a violent encounter against the “unbelievers”, since in the city of Mecca his opponents were the vast majority, while he was well aware of his own political weakness.

In the “Medinian period”, the years after a group of the first adherents to Islam fled from Mecca to the neighbour city, Medina, in 622 AD, the word „djidah“ got a new meaning.

Now Muhammad was gaining more and more recognition and power in Medina, and in his new position as religious leader and military ruler he could easily start war against three of the biggest Jewish tribes living in Medina and several Arabic ones in and around the city. Here the word „djidah“ more and more means „fight“ or „combat“. Surah 47,4 expresses that well: „And when you meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks until, when you have routed them, then making fast of bonds. And afterwards either grace or ransom ... And those who are slain in the way of Allah, He renders not their actions vain.“

According to surah 49,15 the willingness to fight the „djidah“ proves whether somebody has true faith: „The true believers are those only who believe in Allah and his messenger, and afterwards doubt not, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah. Such are the sincere“ (49,15).

## The Paradise for martyrs?

Also, Muslim tradition praises „djidah“: “Djidah” is one of the gates to Paradise“, or: “Djidah” is an act of pure devotion“ (to Allah). Such verses seem to promise that the martyr may enter Paradise because of fighting the “djidah”. In many places the Qoran seems to express that when a martyr dies, he may enter paradise right after his death: „Now if you meet in battle those who disbelieve, then it is smiting of the necks ... And those who are slain in the way of Allah, he renders not their actions vain. He will guide them and improve their state, and bring them in unto the Garden [of Paradise], which he has made known to them“ (surah 47,4-6).

There have always existed suicide commandos outside of Islam, like the Japanese Kamikaze fighters in World War II, for example. But Islam has a certain potential, because of promises like: “Djidah” is one of the gates to Paradise“, as Muslim tradition says. These promises express clearly that suicide attacks are linked with eternal salvation, since in Islam the „normal“ believer will always be uncertain as to whether he will be really saved or not, since Allah is almighty and unpredictable, and the last decision is up to him.

## „Djidah“ in times of Muhammad

There is no doubt among Muslim theologians that after moving to Medina in 622 AD (the “hijra”), Muhammad fought against those who did not want to accept Islam or recognise himself as the messenger of God. From 622 AD on, Muhammad considered the Jews to be the greatest enemies of Islam, but more and more also the Christians and different Arab tribes who did not surrender to him.

The Jews were regarded mainly as political adversaries by Muhammad. He considered them a menace to him because of their big number, and they made fun of him because they did not

accept his claim to be a messenger of God. He chased them out of Medina, killed several hundred men, even after they had surrendered, and sold many women and children into slavery.

For a long time, Muhammad had expected the Christians to accept his preachings. When these hopes were not fulfilled, his first positive impression concerning their piety, love and humbleness was more and more converted into rejection. He now condemned the Christians because of their belief in the Trinity and the sonship of Jesus, which in Muhammad's eyes was polytheism and idolatry. Since the number of the Christians was comparatively small, Muhammad did not attack them in battle, but only condemned them theologically, calling them „unbelievers“ who are awaiting the fires of hell: „Certainly they disbelieve who say: Allah is Christ, the son of Mary... Whoever ascribes partners unto Allah, for him Allah has forbidden paradise. His abode is the fire. For evildoers there will be no helpers. They disbelieve who say: Allah is one of three, for there is no God except One God. If they desist not from their word [of blasphemy], verily a grievous chastisement will befall the disbelievers among them“ (5:72-73).

Muhammad acknowledged that Jews and Christians had already received a revelation from God, so they were in his eyes not just like the Arab polytheists. But according to him, as time went by, Jews and Christians had changed and falsified their revelation. The Qoran also warns the Muslims not to have Christians as friends: „O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors. They are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them [for friendship] is of them. Verily Allah guides not a people unjust“ (5,51).

## **„Djihad“ against the „House of War“ after Muhammad's death**

In the 11th century, the famous Sunni Muslim theologian, al-Mawardi, developed a theory, which has widely won recognition in the Muslim world and is vivid until today. al-Mawardi divided the world into two parts: the „House of Islam“ (in Arabic: dar al-islam), where Islam and its laws is established, and the „House of War“ (in Arabic: dar al-harb), where Islam does not rule yet.

This division is found neither in the Qoran, nor in Muslim traditions. In theory, the „House of Islam“ is in constant war against the „House of War“, which is a justified war, „djihad“, until the „House of War“ has been conquered and turned into the „House of Islam“. The „House of War“ has no right to exist as such side by side with the „House of Islam“, and shall be transformed into it as soon as possible.

## **Peace with the „House of War“**

Muslim theologians hold that there can be a cease in fighting for a while, as the historic example of Muhammad shows, who at times when a victory seemed impossible, made a peace treaty with his enemies. For example, the well known „treaty of Hudaibiya“ in the year 628 with the Meccans, which guaranteed a period of peace for ten years. But Muhammad did not feel obliged to keep this treaty, since in the coming year, 629 he realized that he could win over his partners in the battle of Hunayn and so broke the peace treaty. He was victorious and finally he was free to return to his birthplace Mecca, which had been impossible for him for years, because of the constant hostility of the Meccans towards him. Obviously, Muhammad did not consider this treaty as something binding, since it was only a treaty with „unbelievers“, from his point of view.

## **The invitation to Islam – Islamic „Da’wa“**

Islam is a very active missionary religion, that is continually inviting non-Muslims to convert to Islam. This „invitation“ is also considered to be some sort of „dihad“, because conversions mean extension of Islam. Today, the call to Islam (in Arabic: “Da’wa”) goes out in form of literature and tracts (given out at book-exhibitions and on student campuses), in discussion groups at universities, by distributing the Qoran, by pro-Islamic web-pages in the Internet, youth camps, sport groups, womens meetings, magazines, books, joining Christian meetings and trying to promote Islam there, visiting prisoners in jails and building friendships etc, but also special invitations into mosques at certain days and intercultural/interreligious marriages are a tool to spread Islam because the wife in such a marriage often converts to Islam. In some countries, especially in Africa, social aid programs (schools, hospitals etc.) are restricted to Muslims only or are only available for the price of conversion to Islam.

Extremistic, politically active groups who hold that the „call to Islam“ is also directed to the West and apply the theory of the division between the “House of War“ and the „House of Islam“ draw the conclusion that time has come now for political action.

## **The position of the „People of the Book“ (Jews and Christians) in Islam**

Jews and Christians, the „People of the Book“, as the Qoran calls them (in Arabic: ahl al-kitab), always had a special position in countries conquered by Islam. They were so to say “protégés” (in Arabic: Dhimmis), that is, they were not forced to convert to Islam personally but had to pay a certain amount of money as poll tax (in Arabic: Jizya) and at times also a land tax (in Arabic: haradj). This was a way of buying themselves free from having to convert to Islam (according to surah 9,29).

Many written sources tell us that the Muslim rulers tried hard to minimize the number of the Christians as minorities and to offer advantages in case of conversion or to remove pressure for converts. Christians would always be second class citizens, usually in minor position, often humiliated and only tolerated, but never accepted as equal partners. In different Muslim countries and times Jews and Christians were treated differently. In some places and at some times, they could pretty well live in peace. But usually there was pressure, minor rights or sometimes violence against Christians, like for example the assaults and murders of Christians in Indonesia and Upper Egypt, under the excuse Christians had provoked these conflicts by improper behaviour.

Because of the fact that Christians and Jews and their “idolatrous” faith have no right to exist as such according to many leading Muslim theologians, because of Muhammad’s example of the way he treated the „people of the book“, because of the many Qoran verses commanding to use violence or to call non-believers to Islam and because of the different theories and opinions of Muslim theologians resulting from all this, conditions may be different under which non-Muslims will live in Muslim countries, but they will always have an underprivileged status in the Muslim world, and will enjoy only reduced human and civil rights or will be even actively threatened. The state will not always remove injustices against them. Although many Islamic countries are trying to fight the activities of extremist Islamic groups, because they are even a menace to their own governments, their effort to protect “only” the underprivileged group of the Christians from their attacks is normally far less eager.

## **„Djihad“ today?**

If we apply the pattern of Islamic groups dividing the world into the „House of Islam“ and the „House of War“ literally, then the Western world probably is considered to be the „House of War“, although this does not mean automatically, that there has to be an armed combat. From the extremist point of view the non-Muslim world does not have any right to exist as such. This perspective is being confirmed, in the eyes of the extremists, by the moral decay of the Western world.

## **„The House of the Contract“**

There are also Muslim theologians who believe that Germany, and the rest of the Western states are not part of the „House of War“, and can even be considered to be almost Muslim countries, as long as Muslims can practice their faith freely in these countries and have the same rights as other citizens. Other theologians think that today only a peaceful spread of Islam is legitimate.

## **„Djihad“ of the heart and tongue**

There is a big controversy among Muslim theologians over the question whether this war should be carried out today, and in what way. Some theologians, especially mystics and some Shi'ite theologians, think that true „djidah“ means to live their daily lives according to the laws of Islam and to take its laws seriously. This would be the „djidah of the heart and of the tongue and of the hands“, which is, according to them, way superior to the „djidah of the sword“.

The problem concerning the question of „djidah“ is that because of Muhammad's example and his treatment of nonbelievers, (peaceful preaching first, then combat), because of the existence of various Qoran passages favouring either peaceful proclamation of Islam or military confrontation, because of the varying practise of Muslim rulers in treating non-Muslims, because of the lack of a highest teaching authority in the Muslim world and also because of the continually changing inner and outside political circumstances in the Muslim world, there are many different interpretations of the duty to fight „djidah“. Politically active groups can justify their deeds by verses of the Qoran that call to violent encounters („djidah“ by the sword), while mystics and those that consider the inward searching of God to be the very center of Islam and emphasize the peaceful purposes of djihad., can also claim to follow the “true” Islamic path.

## **Terrorist attacks and the Western World: Different perceptions of East and West**

Those who have heard some Muslim voices in recent times which did not condemn the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, may be surprised that there emerged some sort of explanation, like for example blaming the „Zionists“ or the Mossad, the CIA, the American Mafia, etc. being responsible for the attacks. „Now they want to blame the Arab world for the catastrophe,“ one Egyptian said in an interview. And this is not just a single case, but the point of view of many Muslims in the Near and Middle East. America or Israel have insinuated these cases themselves, to be able to blame the Muslim world and to attack it. In the press there was even a notice stating that 400 (or 4.000) Jews did skip work in the World Trade Center on September 11th, because the Jews knew about the attacks beforehand!

## **The superiority of Islam**

One of the reasons for these models of „explanations“ can be found in the Muslim or Near Eastern “worldview”, which differs largely from the Western perspective. Already in the Qoran we find the statement that the Muslims „... are the best of peoples, evolved for mankind“ (3:110), and thus separating themselves from Christians and Jews. Muhammad as to the Muslims’ opinion is the last and most important prophet, who was already proclaimed by Adam, Abraham, Moses and even by Jesus! Muhammad calls all, even the Christians, to convert to the true religion of Islam. Islam is considered the first religion of mankind that has already existed from eternity and is the only one that will persist in eternity, because „the religion before Allah is Islam“ (3:19).

## **Western society as a bad, abominable example**

Regarding these ideas, it is very hard for politically active Muslims to accept the fact that the West is in a more powerful position in the world than is the Muslim world. The West has the economical and the military power. According to some extremists, the Western world is not entitled to be the ruler of the world, neither for religious reasons, nor for moral reasons. Not for religious reasons, because Christianity, with which the West is identified, is a religion that will only exist for a certain time, while Islam is the best, most reasonable, holiest, most moral and eternal religion, most pleasing to God.

And for moral reasons, the West does not possess the right to rule the world, since Islamists are well aware of - as they perceive it - the omnipresent immorality of Western society (homosexuality, prostitution, abortion, divorce, families falling apart, etc). Therefore they come to the conclusion that Islam is the very answer for this society they consider wicked, pluralistic and evil; a society which has no orientation and whose collapse is not far ahead.

In the eyes of many Islamistic groups, the West is ready to be taken over by Islam. They just do not agree on the means how to change Western societies: Some want to accomplish this by peaceful proselytizing, others fight for recognition and equal rights for Islam, and still others think that it is time to free the world of the „unfair“ and „unjust“ ruling of the Western world, even if that means war.

## **The dilemma of the Muslim world**

A further almost unknown way of thinking of some Islamists lies in their deep-rooted feelings of being inferior and humiliated by the West. The time of colonialism, which is seen as a direct continuation of the crusades, is still very present in the East’s memory, and today many Muslims consider the intervention of the United States in the Muslim world as a continuation or repetition of the past oppression. This idea seems to be confirmed when the United States for example supports different Muslim groups which are in conflict with each other, as it was pursued during the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when the States supported the Taliban, who now are their adversaries. Even economical and infrastructural aid programs are considered by them as a willful humiliation by the West

One climax of these humiliations was the time when the United States supported Saudi-Arabia in the Gulf War in 1991. It was a shock to the Saudi-Arabian population, especially those people who have no access to Western ideas or the Western style of life. The American soldiers entered their country as non-Muslims, as Christians, who had Bibles, which are forbidden in Saudi-Arabia, and maybe they brought with them alcohol, pork and blood, which would make the country ritually unclean. Maybe, some of them lived in extra-marital relationships, which is absolutely forbidden by Islamic law. As soldiers they did not respect the Saudi-Arabian clothing regulations, and even brought women soldiers along, who drove

cars, which was also absolutely forbidden for Saudi-Arabian women at this time. Saudi-Arabia was in the dilemma of having been in desperate need of the help of the West, yet at the same time has to condemn the Western immoral lifestyle and Christian religion.

Osama bin Laden gave an interview about the American intervention in the Gulf war: „Without doubt, this underhand attack is a proof that Great Britain and America have been sent by the Jews and the State of Israel to split up the Muslim world again, to enslave them and to rob them... Now in the country where Mohammed was born and the Qoran was revealed to him, we meet Non-believers everywhere ... The situation is very serious. The rulers have lost their power. We Muslims should fulfill our duty, since the rulers of this region have resigned to this situation. These countries belong to Islam, and not to those who rule here.“ These words express the helplessness of the humiliated “victim”, facing the „invasion“ of an illegitimate power.

Pakistan is facing the same conflict now. Their military ruler Perwez Musharraf is trying to side with the West, but at the same time has to explain to his own people and Pakistan’s islamistic majority why he prefers to associate with a Western government instead of choosing the solidarity and Muslim brotherhood of Afghanistan.

No wonder that in many Muslims’ eyes Israel as a Jewish state – and the Jews are already harshly condemned and despised in the Qoran - now under the protection of mighty America, is a real pain for Muslims in general, but even more for extremists. Therefore conspiracy theories emerge which sound so illogical to the West, but if we take a look at the “worldview” of extreme islamistic groups, we understand how it comes.

### **The Near Eastern understanding of honour and disgrace**

The Near Eastern understanding of honour and disgrace plays an important role in the Muslims’ way of thinking. The superiority of the West and the helplessness of the Muslim world is considered to be a loss of honour. We hardly understand in the West how important the concept of honour is in the Near East, and by what means this honour is endangered. Honour is more important than life. Women are responsible for the honour of a family. Through their behaviour they either maintain or destroy the honour of their families. If a woman has endangered the honour of her family, there is nothing she can do to get it back. Her husband, father, brother or uncle has to win the family’s honour back which is always connected with drastic measures, which may even include killing his wife, mother, sister or niece.

One example of a drastic reactions to public loss of honour and of disgrace was an interview with the father of one of the supposed terrorists, one of the pilots of the airplanes which crashed into the World Trade Center. Muhammad al-Atta’s father, who was said to have lost touch with his son for one and a half years, got very angry and annoyed when he was confronted with the suspicion that his son could have had something to do with the hijacking of the airplanes. He had been seen the evening before in a bar, drinking alcohol? Impossible! “That would be the same as if a devout veiled virgin would bring prostitutes into Egypt!“ This allusion to sexuality makes clear to all Arab ears how deeply insulted he felt!

Muhammad al-Atta’ s father felt that he had lost his face in the public because of these direct accusations. Open disgrace because of suspicion uttered by the West will always cause very strong reactions!

Because in the Muslim world a family tries very hard not to lose their honour - and no one can live without having honour – one of the defense mechanisms is to blame others. Unsolved problems and conflicts in the Near East (shortage of jobs, crisis in education, missing infrastructure, corruption, overpopulation, economic inefficiency) are blamed on the existence



or the supposed conspiracy of the Western world against the Muslim world, who try their best to harm and even destroy the Near East. That is why we hear of the many conspiracy theories in connection with the terrorists attacks, which to non-Muslims sound so illogical.

## Conclusions

It is a fact that many crimes have been committed in the name of Christianity, innocent people have been killed and nobody can deny the crusades. But these “religious wars” so to say have always been in contrast to biblical teaching as well as to the one who calls himself the „Prince of Peace“. Christian mission in its very sense should never be anything else than a loving invitation, through our words and deeds towards our neighbours to the only one who can give true love to mankind. „He who lives with the sword, shall die by the sword“ and „Put back your sword“ (Matthew 26:52) are not just last words of Jesus Christ before he was captured and his death came by, but also underline the Christian message, which stands against all forms of violence and teaches respect for others. Yes, it even teaches to esteem one’s own brother higher than oneself.

Christians sadly have to agree to parts of the analysis of the illnesses of Western society, uttered by Muslim theologians. But peace in a society will never come by through ruling with the sword, through repression of minorities and establishing Islamic law over mankind. Only when people find peace with God and with themselves, they will also be capable of living in peace with their neighbours.

For terrorist groups on the other hand it is easily possible to interpret certain passages in the Qoran as calls to violence and war against the unbelievers, which they consider to be still valid for today, and to find support in the example of Muhammad treating his enemies. At the moment these groups feel that the Muslim world is suffering from another „humiliation“, for which the decadent West is called to account.

As long as the West does not understand in which categories these extreme Islamistic groups think, little can be done to avoid further attacks. In the last 40 years since Muslim workers have come to Germany and have grown to a number of 3.3 million (because of their high birth rates and family reunification), we, in general, did not try hard enough to understand the theological and ideological background of the different groups, and we definitely have not invested enough in personal relationships.

In the beginning, the concept of the „guest worker“, who would sooner or later return to his home country, hindered the development of concepts for integration, but even when it became clear that the majority of the Muslims of the second and third generation living in Germany in the 80ies and 90ies would not return to their homelands, Western society still did not change its attitude toward their “guest workers”. At the same time many Muslims became more and more reserved and withdrew from German society. In Great Britain a parallel society has already emerged. Muslims demand that Muslim citizens are judged according to Islamic laws, not according to Western, British laws. Integration seems to have failed here!

It seems imperative to start thinking in new categories, and to try to find new solutions for living together with each other. Christians should think about how they want to handle the challenge of Islam being present in Europe, cultivating relationships with one another and getting to be well informed about Islam, as well as inviting their Muslim neighbours to meet the “Prince of Peace”.