

Confronting the clash between morality and materiality

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A new global challenge is facing us as Christians and Muslims. Many of the most urgent and important political and moral issues today have a global character. This has become clear after 9.11 and the military action against Iraq.

The world has become more and more polarised, but the dividing line is not between Christians and Muslims. The clash that is taking place is not between "civilisations" (as predicted by Huntington) but between those who are motivated by morality and wisdom on the one hand and those who are governed by materiality and self-interests on the other.

All over the world - in the US, in Israel, in Iraq - masses of people were resisting the war in Iraq and were against the use of violence as a means to chase own national interests. A vast number of Muslims and non-Muslims are together in expressing this resistance.

There seems to be a tendency in our time towards an idealisation of individualism and egoism. "Greed is good for progress" it has been said by a Western politician. Responsibility is narrowed down. A human being is not someone to relate to in responsibility. A human being is someone who must pay off. Market-thinking has delivered a legitimisation of this self-occupation of the individual. Ethos has fallen out of the globalisation process, and humanity has not developed a common basis for this situation.

Religion comes in here to contradict this - Christianity with its impulse of Love, Islam with its emphasis on human dignity, social justice, duties, community etc. - as a motivating force that can appeal to the human conscience and thus to ethical action.. Our religions indicate that market-economy is insufficient to secure responsibility for the whole, the totality. We need to democratise, humanise the global - create an international community governed by law that gives legitimacy to international institutions and to more just distribution of goods and power.

We are confronted with an urgent situation where we have to face common threats and challenges together, where we have to act and work together in order to go against this tendency. It is a life necessity. And we are not used to that situation. Many Christians and Muslims are interested in dialogue and co-operation but often do not know how to do it.

We also face a situation where we cannot just listen to the words of statesmen (they may have different motivations), but must listen to the masses of people (Europeans, Americans, Palestinians, Israelis, Sudanese, Nigerians, Indians, Iraqis etc.). They have a crucial role in shaping the global agenda.

However, as Christian and Muslim organisations we are not alone in this. And we have to be careful not to resist and work as a religious clique but side with those forces, NGO-movements that work for peace, justice, environmental protection etc. We must find new channels, new alliances.

How can Christians and Muslims together identify and act on an agenda for the future? How can we as Christians and Muslims involve ourselves in a dialogue and diapraxis that confronts common challenges and urgent problems in our society? The answer to these questions must be contextual. Diverse situations exist around the world. The dynamics of one particular national or regional context demand different approaches. Interplay of local diversity and

global commonality makes our discernment of future agendas more complicated than ever before. The degree of secularisation, the existence or non-existence of a tradition of plurality, political development, the role of religion in the various countries are factors to be considered.

It can be generally stated, however, that our new challenge - made more important because of international integration and inter-dependency - calls for a dialogue that is not only relational but also mutual. And this "dialogue" can be defined as the attempt to create or recreate relationships between people at all levels through practical co-operation - to heal broken relationships through transformation of relations and structures. In the centre of such activities is egalitarian reciprocity and mutual trust. Togetherness, mutuality and confidence must be the foundation of our thinking about dialogue and co-operation..

This is connected with the fact that development on a global level cannot continue to take place only on the premises of the western world (and esp. the US) but must also take place on the premises of the other parts of the world, incl. the so-called Muslim world. We need a concept of cross-cultural international morality compatible with the norms and values of all civilisations on an equal footing.

It is therefore important to create and strengthen common Muslim-Christian bodies at national, regional and international levels. Inter-religious events are not sufficient, but intensive institutional contacts and bilateral relationships must be built. It is the steady laborious work that has an effect.