



TOPIC 1: Debate on values

Teaching and learning aids

Mohammad (570-632)

When Augustine – Bishop of Hippo Regius – died in 430, this port was under siege by the Vandals. Only about 350 years later the Muslims conquered the coastal strip between what today are Algeria and Tunisia and from then on Islam was decisive in determining the way of life of all North African peoples up to the present day.

If Augustine directed the eyes of Christians in a certain sense away from the material world's social order (civitas terrena) to the City of God (civitas Dei), so Islam directed Muslims more toward actively shaping the world. (T 1/15)

Umma

The social framework in which Muslim communal life is to be organized is called Umma, which can mean a tribe, an empire, or a state, as well as a religious community such as that of Jews or Christians. In the course of time it came more and more to mean the Muslim community (Umma Muhammadiyya or Islamiyya). *"The spiritual and cultural unity of Muslims in the "Umma" is seen by Muslims as the symbol of God's unity. As a member of the "Umma", the Muslim was and is a member of the "Dar al-Islam" (House of Islam). Only here can he fulfil his religious duties best. The unity of the "Umma" is expressed in acknowledging and obeying together the Law of God. It is the duty of Muslim political leaders to put into practice the "Umma" and keep it free from division and heresy.* (KHOURY and others, 1991, p. 292f).

Discussion on what the Umma should be, a goal to strive for or a former state to bring back, is under way among scholars as well as among fanatic Islamic intellectuals and fundamentalists. (T 1/16)

Since Muslim believers can hardly imagine a secular Umma outside divine law, the Sharia, it is difficult for them to lead a fully integrated social life in a non-Islamic state. A Muslim believer must feel this to be a continual threat to his identity. (T 1/17)

In view of the present socio-economic conditions in almost all Islamic countries the question must arise as to*"whether Islam as a cultural system that claims to be absolute and timeless and therefore against history, inhibits change, or whether Muslims have developed their own ways of getting round this absoluteness in daily practice without giving up believing in it."* (TIBI, 1991, p 28)

Europe as part of Umma territory?

Probably a large proportion of Muslims living in Europe do not take literally (in a fundamental sense) some sayings of the Koran; nevertheless those who do are faced with the problem either of having to behave hypocritically towards European society or of sinning in a strictly Islamic sense against the divine injunction to introduce Umma for all Europeans to live in, i.e. as active missionaries.

"Consequently a Belgian Islamist expressed himself at a public meeting at the Dutch University of Leyden as follows: »We as Moslems obey the laws valid in Europe«, but not their spirit. Then followed the restrictive phrase: »... and this as long as we are in the minority «" (TIBI, 2002, p. 55)

The founder and director of the London Muslim College, Imam Zaki Badawi, at the World Economic Forum 2001 in Davos benevolently described western Europe no longer as the House of War (Dar al-harb) and included it in the House of Islam (Dar al-Islam), since about 15 Million Muslims already lived here. That Europe has its own (ca.1000 years older) identity and will not become Islamic because of a few million Islamic immigrants, this he could not see. (TIBI, 2002, p. 55)

Challenges and conflicts between Islam and the European-western world.

Religions and Violence

There are many examples of the use of force as a sign of divine power both in the Bible for Jews and Christians and in the Koran for Muslims, but there are just as many elements for criticizing and restricting force in both books that demand both of Jews and Christians as well as of Muslims peace, mercy, forgiveness and justice to one another. (MAIER, 2004, p. 18ff)

History in the memory of peoples

The history of the last 3000 years has many events to illustrate the above-mentioned principles of the monotheistic religions. The territorial acquisition of Palestine by the Jews, the spread of Islam (C 1/3), the Reconquista of the Christians in Spain (C 1/4), the crusades of the Christians against Islamic occupation of the Holy Places (C 1/5), the partly forced Christianization of America. It can only be hoped that the religiously motivated acts of violence by Islamic fundamentalists (Jihadists) of most recent times will soon be followed by a phase of turning back to the peaceful messages of the Koran.

The tasks before us - in view of the present situation – are indeed very difficult and demand particular efforts especially in the field of education.

Where is the line of conflict?

The situation from a Muslim point of view is described by part of a text in a lecture by Adel Theodor KHOURY, given on 8.02.2004 at the Transnational COMCULT-Meeting in Utrecht. (T 1/18)

From the point of view of all European states and America, values have to be brought to bear on Islam which are indispensable for peaceful co-existence in these regions and are therefore not negotiable.

1. Renunciation of Islamic claims to superiority over so-called western culture.
2. Recognition of religious pluralism with equal standing. This is not the same as polytheism, as all three Abrahamic religions in principle believe in the same God.
3. Separation of religion und political life (state).
4. Recognition of all human rights, in particular those of the individual and equality between men and women.

How did different developments come about between western European and Islamic cultural spheres?

The initial conditions of both cultures were not fundamentally different right up to the 16th. century, although two significant developments had already begun:

- Islam dealt with the heritage of Greco-Roman philosophy differently from the so-called Christian western world.
- Islam did not share the dualism between secular and clerical dominion. This started to develop in western Europe in the Middle Ages and from the 16th. century made thought possible independently of dominion and religion. Humanism, Renaissance and enlightenment as intellectual movements remained unknown in the Islamic world up to the 19th. century.

Only a few Osman scholars or ambassadors found it necessary to occupy themselves with the world of the infidels and when they did, they did so superficially and imprecisely. *"The European is different, but not because he belongs to a different nation, lives under a different ruler, in a different country or speaks a different language. He is different because he has a different religion. Because of this difference he is considered an enemy and known to be inferior. Authors writing about Christianity use beyond question a familiar method of modern propaganda and assertion in emphasizing these views through endless repetition and bringing them to people's awareness. With few exceptions no European nation or group or even a European individual is mentioned without adding »infidel«."* (LEWIS, 1983, p. 177f)

Summary

The central principle and force of Islam is the unity and oneness of God (tawhid). By analogy the Umma is seen as the unique community of all believers. As it is also an important framework in which the believing Muslim can bear witness to his faith, he will find it difficult to recognize even in principle a pluralistically organized Umma from within.

Since western democracies depend in essence on voluntary consensus of people (individuals) who make their own law, it must either seem sacrilege or at least be disturbing to a Muslim, or call for change and exertion at many different levels of Jihad.