Introduction

Kajsa Ahlstrand and *Göran Gunner*

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In order to discuss the situation for Non-Muslims in Muslim majority societies a consultation was convened with participants from Pakistan, Palestine, Lebanon and Sweden, both Muslims and Christians. Some work in academic settings, others in Faith based organizations, some in jurisprudence and others with theological issues. The papers presented at the consultation were "works in progress," and they remain tentative; the intention with this anthology is to provoker reflection and further thinking. Towards the end of the consultation, five distinct areas of concern were identified. The discussions were framed around power imbalances in relationships between powerful states/less powerful states and/or powerful religious communities and less powerful religious communities. Questions for further studies emerged, for example: in what ways is power situational? How does political power relate to economic, cultural, social, and moral power? What is the relationship between the local and the international? A religious community may be a vulnerable minority in a given place but belong to strong and numerous communities in an

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international perspective. Every religious community is a minority somewhere; some religious communities are also religious majorities elsewhere. The local/national majority religious community may perceive the local minority as a threatening representative of a powerful international community, whether it is "the powerful, colonial Christian world" of popular Muslim imagination or "the powerful, jihadist Muslim world" of popular Christian imagination. In both cases it is important to find ways to address fears so that the outcome may lead to peaceful coexistence between the communities. Some of the prerequisites for such harmonious relations are outlined in the papers presented here.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The fact that human rights are not divinely revealed but human constructions make them open to negotiation, interpretation, amendment, and discussion. They can only be implemented by humans, not by divine command. Although not instituted by God, the concept of human rights finds deep resonance in many religious traditions, including Islam and Christianity.

Human rights being human, they are thus inclusive of both women and men. In most cultures the specter of patriarchy—in the sense of a system that assigns subordinate positions to women in relation to men (including the kind of complementarity that assigns domestic tasks to women and social and political tasks to men)—is a case in point. Human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights.

Religious duties and rules must be seen in relation to human rights. There are cases when tensions between religious traditions and human rights run deep. Although there are no easy and universally applicable solutions the very fact that the tensions can be identified means that the discussion is not closed.

All member states of the United Nations are bound by international law, but there are violations of religious freedoms everywhere. To identify and make public such situations, especially when religious communities other than one's own are targeted, are important tasks for religious leaders in every society.

The definition of "minority" needs to be clarified. "Minority" in the Middle East often refers to the Islamic concept *Dhimmi. Dhimmi* (legally recognized non-Muslims in Muslim majority areas) were according to

Shari'ah legislation protected by the majority but subject to special rules such as paying a poll tax and, in some cases, wearing of clothes that identified them as *Other*. When used in human rights discourse the term "minority" carries different connotations.

In democratic societies minorities have equal rights with the majority. According to international law religious minorities are recognized as minorities and should be granted rights of protection in society. A minority is defined as a group that in a given society has

- numerical inferiority
- social non-dominance
- sense of solidarity in the group
- shared history
- citizenship

THE VALUE OF A SECULAR STATE

These collected papers show that there are forms of secularism that are acceptable and even desirable for religious traditions. A secular state need not be regarded as inimical to religion; on the contrary separation between religion and state enables religious pluralism to be realized. Thus, it is desirable that the state is religiously neutral, treating different religious communities as contributors to the common good. The right to hold a belief and to pass it on to the next generation is central, as is the right to manifest one's belief in the public sphere.

There are different meanings of secularism/secular society. Some are ideologically opposed to religion and try to curb the influence of religion in all spheres. But there are also secular societies where people from different religious traditions are free to practice their religion in public. Religious people from different traditions may accept and support a secular society that is benevolent towards religion and appreciates the added values that religions might bring to their faithful: moral rectitude, responsibility in society, sense of direction, hope, and spiritual fulfillment. Religious people may thus support a secular state.

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THE ROLE OF EDUCATION ABOUT RIGHTS AND RELIGIONS

Some of the papers emphasize that in many parts of the world there is an immense difference between educated and uneducated people. The educated know about their own religious tradition, they are aware that there are variations within the tradition and they also know about other traditions. They know their rights—and they are aware of their responsibilities. This is not just a question of formal schooling; it is about attitudes to knowledge and formation. The kind of education which helps people to be proud of their own tradition but also to appreciate what is good in other traditions should be encouraged. This ideal is unfortunately often utopian, as many children do not even receive rudimentary education. It is, however, a priority not only to teach reading, writing and "catechesis", but also awareness of human rights and respectful knowledge about other religions.

IDENTITY ISSUES AND NARRATIVES

The question of education is closely linked to that of identity: how is "we" understood? Is the "we" defined over against/in contrast to "them"? Or can there be a "we" that affirms its identity together with the identities of other "we-s"? What narratives are transmitted from one generation to the next or from one group to another? In what ways can a group honor its martyrs and confessors without perpetuating inter-communal violence?

Emotion of belonging is a common human feature; to feel at home means that one is able to say: "we belong here." A national identity is often not sufficient; local identities may be more important. The problems arise when local identity groups vie for power and limited resources. Identity is not only a subjective feeling; it is often also a political instrument. Both religious and ethnic groups need to seek positive identifications that respect the dignity of other religious and ethnic groups.

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The papers state two things about inter-religious dialogue: a) The alternative to dialogue—that is to isolate oneself within one's own religious community—is not a viable option; and b) Dialogue should be more about building trust and identifying common concerns than a conversation between doctrinal experts. During the consultation a story once

told by Bishop Kenneth Fernando of Sri Lanka was referred to several times: "When my wife tells me that we need to talk I know that I am in trouble. But if she has made tea and we drink it together we also talk. This has taught me that it is better to invite our neighbors to tea than to dialogue." Some of the contributions emphasize that we are not just our religion; we are also professionals, citizens, human beings with physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual needs. When inter-religious dialogue moves in the direction of inter-religious diapraxis (the practical reality of living and working together) it is more fruitful than when it is only about talking; while we strive towards common goals we also get to know and trust one another.

It is important that different Islamic movements (non-governmental institutions or independent scholars) are involved in dialogue/diapraxis, not only persons and organizations that have support from the state. Inter-religious relations differ from one area to another. Christians in Western Europe have different narratives of Christian-Muslim relations than those prevalent in the Middle East (where Christians tend to portray Muslims as Christian apostates or defectors). Some themes are identified as needing further elaboration:

- The image of the other in an inter faith-relationship
- The image of religious groups in the media and the responsibility of people involved in dialogue to oppose vilifications of religious groups in the media
- The other as a friend and as a threat
- Confronting stereotypes; religious Orientalism as well as religious Occidentalism

CO-OPERATION BEHIND THE BOOK

Behind this book stands a co-operation between the Christian Study Centre, Rawalpindi in Pakistan and several institutions in Sweden: the Swedish Pakistan Committee (Church of Sweden and Mission Covenant Church of Sweden), Studies of Mission at Uppsala University, Stockholm School of Theology, Church of Sweden Research Department, and Lund Missionary Society.

With these introductory remarks we invite you to read *Non-Muslims in Muslim Majority Societies*.