



The Abrahamic Forum is an association of Jews, Christians, Muslims and Bahá'í including academics and experts, meeting within the Intercultural Council in Germany. In Frankfurt on 23 August 2007, it held a lively debate on the following positions. They are now presented for public discussion to mark European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008:

From the Christian West to Abrahamic Europe

Position paper

Preamble

Migration, globalisation and democratisation are changing Europe's sense of identity. The Christian West used to set itself apart from Judaism and Islam. Bringing about peaceful co-existence of Jews, Christians and Muslims in the 21st century will call for a change of attitude. The following positions are intended to help bring this about.

1. Europe has been shaped by the Abrahamic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are part of European history. The fact that Muslims lived for centuries in Andalusia is often overlooked. Muslim Tatars still live in Finland and the Baltic States; Eastern European countries were for centuries under Muslim rule; part of the population of Cyprus is Muslim; and Bosnia, Albania, Kosovo and Turkey are mainly Muslim. In Europe there are over 50 million Muslims; over 15 million of them live in the European Union.

Over 98% of the people with a religious background in Europe belong to the Abrahamic religions. Christianity is of outstanding importance historically and to the present day.

2. Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Bahá'í are connected by common values.

- Belief in the God of Abraham, who is nevertheless understood differently
- Regarding humans as made in the image of God or, in Islam, as God's vice-regent
- Justice as a supreme value that can secure world peace and contribute to overcoming poverty through specific structures
- Dedication to peace and opposition to violence and terror
- Maintaining the integrity of God's good creation
- Hospitality as practised by Abraham and the rejection of xenophobia and racism

These common values are part of the European sense of identity. Most of them are also shared by those who belong to no religion.

3. Abrahamic religions have elements of a common spirituality.

Common elements have their roots in faith in the one God, who was faithful to Abraham and in whose name Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and Baha`ullah later spoke.

Common elements are found in the Torah, Bible, Koran and the writings of Baha`u'llah. There are many points in common in the Torah, in particular, and in the reverence shown the Hebrew prophets. The Psalms can be read and used as prayers by members of the Abrahamic religions.

4. Besides the points in common there are also differences, which are to be respected.

- The Christian understanding of Jesus and the Trinity is not found in Judaism or Islam.
- The Islamic esteem for Muhammad and the Koran is not found in Judaism or Christianity.
- Jews, Christians and Muslims do not share the faith of the Bahá'í in God's messengers like Baha'ú'llah.
- There are differences in religious practice, worship, understanding of mission and much more.
- Social, cultural and historical difference plus the age of the religions play a considerable role, alongside the religious factors.
- There are differences e.g. in the understanding of the relationship between men and women or of human rights, where talks should lead to approximations of the standards broadly accepted in Europe.

5. Passing on knowledge about the different religions is a task for those raising and educating the young.

Religions and confessions define themselves through their own profiles and through contrasting with each other. Religious leaders mostly have little authentic knowledge of other religions and little interest in the points they hold in common.

Interfaith competence should be introduced into theological training and be a precondition for giving religious education classes at schools. Authentic information about the different religions must be given in educational programmes. School books must be checked to see whether they convey an understanding of religion and cultures that is authentic and unprejudiced. That entails knowledge of the achievements of Jewish and Muslim Europeans e.g. in the areas of mathematics, medicine, architecture, philosophy, painting, literature and music. Curricula must include training in the art of dialogue.

6. Abrahamic cooperation promotes mutual understanding.

Prejudices and anxiety are widespread and hamper the formation of Abrahamic bodies. There are not many Abrahamic Forums or working groups. Setting up Abrahamic teams is easier, in which qualified Jews, Christians, Muslims and Bahai work together and are available for events at schools, in youth work or in other organisations. Young Abrahamic Forums, in which young people come together, deal with prejudices and forge friendships.

The government, local authorities and society should promote commonalities e.g. through supporting Jewish-Christian, Jewish-Muslim, Christian-Islamic, Abrahamic and interreligious cooperation or the establishment of "Abraham's Houses".

Members of Abrahamic religions will regard it as important to dialogue with people with no religious background.

7. Participation at each other's rituals improves community.

Shared celebrations and festivals improve mutual understanding. That involves e.g. invitations to the Sukkot Festival, to Christmas parties, to Iftar meals in Ramadan, to the Festival of Sacrifice (Eid-ul-Adha) or a Noah Festival and also at joint events marking the Day of the Religions in Germany, Open Mosque Day and other festivities.

8. Mission is disputed among the Abrahamic religions.

Jews reject all mission activity. Muslims claim not to seek converts from adherents of Abrahamic religions, even though that may sometimes be observed. In Christianity

there is a 'great commission' that is expressed in witness to one's own faith. For Bahai, proclaiming the message of Baha'u'llah to all people has great importance, while they point to the words of the founder: "If religion leads to enmity and strife there is not doubt that a lack of religion would be preferable."

For centuries religions have lived side by side, of which people are becoming increasingly aware. Religions can vie with one another for good. Believers bear witness to their faith. Mission is contested among supporters of Abrahamic religions. In our time, religions should especially concentrate on those people who have become alienated from religions or have terminated their membership. The human right to religious freedom involves people joining, leaving or also living without a religion.

9. Europe needs an Abrahamic ecumenical movement

Ecumenism is mostly understood to mean the worldwide Christian cooperation. The concept of ecumenism relates to the whole inhabited earth and can thus also be applied to the Abrahamic cooperation.

Christian ecumenism has achieved great things in its history. In the past there were wars against members of Christian denominations. Now the time has come for an Abrahamic ecumenism that is also important globally. It could be a model for the rapprochement of East and West. It could open Europe up for all the countries of the Mediterranean, as was repeatedly possible in history.

10. Peace in Europe requires a good community between Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, rejection of Christians and Bahá'i are widespread and are increasing in some places. Dialogue, common celebrations and youth projects could reduce fears and foster the best in the religions.

Through cooperation and mutual respect, Abrahamic religions in Europe could stabilise internal peace and improve intercultural relations and life together.

For the Abrahamic Forum in Germany:

- Bekir Alboga, Turkish Islamic Union of the Authority for Religion (DITIB), Cologne
- Regional Rabbi Dr. Henry G.Brandt, Central Council of the Jews in Germany, Augsburg
- Dr.Armin Eschraghi, National Spiritual Council of the Bahá'i in Germany, Frankfurt/M.
- Dr.Jürgen Micksch, Groeben Foundation and Intercultural Council in Germany, Darmstadt
- Barbara Rudolph, Director of the Council of Churches in Germany (ACK), Frankfurt/M.

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