

## THE CHURCHES AND ISLAM IN EUROPE

### *European Ecclesiastical Umbrellas*

This article is mainly concerned with the encounters between church and mosque, Muslims and Christians, in Europe that have occurred during the last 50 years. These resulted from labour and post-colonial migration, accompanied, and followed by the arrival of many refugees from troubled countries with a Muslim majority. Although these new arrivals mainly affected the religious demographics of Western Europe, due to religious and political proximity and a partly shared history, the new phenomenon did not fail to have an additional impact on centuries-old relations between Christians and Muslims in Eastern Europe. In this article we will focus mainly on the role of the Consultative Committee on Islam in Europe (CCIE) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of Roman Catholic Episcopal Conferences in Europe or, in Latin, the Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae (CCEE) (established in 1978). One member of the CCEE, Prelate Paul Huot-Pleuroux, called the start of the official cooperation between CEC and CCEE in April 1978 a historic moment because this kind of cooperation had not been seen since the Reformation (Huot-Pleuroux 1995: 70). In his retrospect in 1993, Huot-Pleuroux declared that the Islam committee has been the most important joint project of the CEC and CCEE. The CCIE benefitted from this new hopeful ecumenical climate. Until 1986, participation by the CCEE was only partial (see below). After 1986, the word ‘Consultative’ was dropped when a new committee was constituted in which the CCEE participated fully. During the last period, until its dissolution in 2008, it was called the Committee for Relations with Muslims in Europe (CRME).

It goes without saying that the CCIE was not the only European ecclesiastical player in the field of Christian-Muslim relations. Other international players will be mentioned here whenever it is deemed relevant for as complete a picture as possible within the limits set for this article. But the Committee on Islam in Europe of the CEC and CCEE was certainly the most representative body because it was instituted by the two largest ecclesiastical umbrella organizations on the whole continent, and it reflected the variety in background that is specific for the contacts with Muslims in Europe, which we will describe in the next section. The Conference of European Churches, founded in 1959 with its headquarters in Geneva, included 125 member churches. The CEC is not a branch of the World Council of Churches but an independent organization. It is

one of eight regional ecumenical bodies in Africa, Asia, America and the Middle East. The CCIE/Islam in Europe Committee had regular exchanges of speakers and visitors with four of these bodies. At least 30 of its member churches are not members of the WCC. The CEC addresses problems that are specific for Europe. It comprises approximately 90% of non-Roman Catholic Christians in Europe.

The constitution of the CCEE was passed on 1 May 1971 (Numico 2010). Its head office is located in St. Gallen, Switzerland, and has 37 constituting members. It maintains strong, organic links with the Vatican. Through its Committee on Church and Society, the CEC is represented in the proximity of the offices of the European Union in Brussels.<sup>1</sup> During the Communist era, churches behind the Iron Curtain were able to send their representatives to meetings on all levels of both umbrella organizations.

This focus on the (C)CIE/CRME implies that this article refers to but does not deal with other Europe-based Christian organizations that have a dialogue programme engaged in producing publications. We do make two exceptions: the Churches' Committee on Migrant Workers in Europe and the Journées d'Arras. Without attempting to be exhaustive, we would also like to mention the following.

(1) Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chrétien/Muslim-Christian Research Group (GRIC) with breakthrough publications such as *The Challenge of the Scriptures: The Bible and the Qur'ân* (French 1987/English 1989). All the reports of the GRIC are published in *Islamochristiana* (ISCH).

(2) The Religionen im Gespräch (RIG) series, edited by Reinhard Kirste for "interreligiöse Arbeitsstelle." This organization is active mainly in the field of education. Since 1990, the RIG has published nine collections of essays on dialogue and the theology of encounter. Volume 7, as the title suggests, contained articles in German, French, English, and Spanish on *New Challenges for Interfaith Dialogue*.

(3) Groupe d'Amitié Islamo-Chrétienne, based in Paris (GAIC). It has organized seven international meetings with participants from five countries (ISCH 33: 205).

These organizations do not have official links with the CCIE, but their officers maintain contact with or participate on a personal basis in its meetings. Sometimes speakers and authors are shared.

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<sup>1</sup> The Roman Catholic Church is represented in Brussels by the COMECE (Commission des Évêques de la Communauté Européenne). In 2008, sponsored by the European Union, the CRME organized a conference in Brussels (ISCH 34: 216-19; see below).

*A Brief Historical Typology*

We acknowledge that various parts of Europe have a long history of contact, conflict, and confrontation with the Muslim world that continues to influence today's attitudes and encounters. Collective memories of past events live on in today's perceptions and keep feeding sensitivities, prejudices, and even nationalist and populist policies. The memories of political events in the past have entered the consciousness and often subconsciousness of Christians and non-Christians, especially journalists, historians, theologians and other opinion makers who express the feelings and convictions of their respective communities on such issues. Recent events in the Muslim world affecting Christian minorities seem sufficient reason for some people to justify a more negative and cautious attitude vis à vis Muslims and their religion. These and other factors make a brief survey of Europe's history with Islam necessary.

## Currents and Countercurrents across the Continent

The first Muslim advances into Europe resulted in Muslim rule for long periods in Spain (711-1492) and Sicily (827-1058). The result was initially a flourishing culture from which other countries in northern and central Europe benefitted (Jayyusi, *passim*). The rights of Jews and Christians were limited but respected. "The distorted image of Islam took shape in Europe between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries" (Watt 1972: 54). Long drawn-out wars with Christian kings resulted in the loss of the last Muslim stronghold, Granada, in 1492 and the last expulsions of the Moriscos (crypto-Muslims) between 1609 and 1614. Due to these events, Christian-Muslim relations were strained or even poisoned for centuries to come. One of the by-products of the Morisco subculture was the pseudepigraphical work, the *Gospel of Barnabas*, a text that predicts the coming of Muhammad and continues to undermine efforts at building trust with Christians in many Muslim circles (De Epalza 1982: 159-83). For more than a century, salafists and Muslim fundamentalists have translated and distributed the Gospel of Barnabas as more authentic, in their view, than the four canonical gospels, thus putting Christians in an awkward spot in Muslim countries (Ryad 2008). The initial *reconquista* in Spain and the conquest by the Normans of Sicily were followed by the strong Christian counterwave of the crusades. The latter had no territorial consequences, but the cultural and religious impact was great (Jankrift 2007: 37f.). Anselm of Canterbury, born in Aosta in Italy, wrote *Cur Deus Homo* on the eve of the first crusade as a conversation between a Christian and a Muslim (Gauss 1963). It was the first theological response by a Western thinker to Islam. The crusades postponed but also foreshadowed the loss of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453.

The second wave of Muslim conquest occurred when Mongol armies entered eastern Europe via Russia. The conquering armies were repulsed under Ivan the Terrible (1530-1584), the Grand Prince of Moscow. In 1788, under Catherine II (the Great) (1729-1796), the "Spiritual Assembly of the Mohammedan Law" was established. She issued a *ukase* (decree) appointing a mufti who re-

ceived a substantial annual allowance (Nikitin 1982). Russia gradually established a colonial empire extending into Central Asia. Russian Orthodox missions among Muslims had limited success. The end of the Soviet Union ushered in a new period in the relations between Orthodox and Baptist churches on the one hand and Muslims on the other. In recent years, several consultations have taken place in eastern Europe. Muslim minorities, mainly Tatar, are still found throughout Russia and even beyond its borders in Finland and Poland.

The third wave was set into motion by the conquests of the Ottoman Empire in eastern Europe. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 resounded in the rest of Europe and created the proverbial fear of the Turks. Ottoman advances were halted at Vienna in 1529 and finally reversed after the siege of that city in 1683. The decline of Ottoman power resulted in independence for Greece (1832), Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and eventually Albania. After 1878 Bosnia became part of Austria, and Austria granted freedom of religion. In October 1882 a council of *ulama* (religious legal scholars) was held, and the office of head of the *ulama* was instituted in Sarajevo. On the eastern side of the Ottoman empire, Armenian desires and attempts at independence ended in disaster in 1915. But Muslim populations stayed behind in the Balkans when Ottoman hegemony retreated.

In the meantime, a strong West European counterwave had started in the Muslim world. From the late sixteenth century on, Portugal, England, the Netherlands, France, and Russia began colonial conquests in India, the East Indies (now Indonesia), Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. From about 1700 European scholars began to obtain more objective and reliable knowledge of the Muslim world. But the end of the Second World War heralded in a new era for colonizers and colonized. One of the outcomes of this period was the fourth Muslim wave mainly in Western Europe in the form of the immigration of thousands of Muslims from Turkey, Morocco, and former colonies with a Muslim majority population. But they were not simply immigrants. The motto of many newcomers was: "We are here because you were there."

#### *Initial Reactions of the Churches to Demographic Changes*

It is difficult to obtain reliable statistics about the total number of Muslims in Europe. Often, all immigrants from a country with a Muslim majority are viewed as Muslims. The data of 46 country reports (excluding the Istanbul area) yields a total number of Muslims in Europe as around 45 million. Some countries do not give exact figures because their statistics do not include religious affiliation (Nielsen 2010). The 1999 *Yearbook of the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (315) mentions 2,530,000 Jews, 1,382,000 Hindus, 1,517,000 Buddhists, 236,000 Sikhs, and 126,000 Bahais. The demographer of this yearbook calculated that there were 558,729,000 Christians. The number of atheists

is given as more than 170,000,000. These numbers concerning nominal membership have to be questioned. Christianity and other religions are facing a decline in active membership and commitment in secular Europe. Nevertheless, the enormous increase in the number of Muslim immigrants made it possible to predict that the Muslim presence would become a lasting phenomenon in West European societies.

The churches assessed the arrival of these immigrants as primarily a socio-economic challenge. Therefore, the World Council of Churches in Geneva and the Vatican in Rome responded in similar ways. In addition to the WCC migration desk, 17 Protestant, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox churches founded the Churches Committee for Migrant Workers in Europe (CCMWE) in 1964 in which regional committees normally linked with national councils of churches were represented. In 1978, the CCMWE moved its office from Geneva to Brussels, and in 1969 Pope Paul VI published the apostolic letter *Pastoralis migratorum cura*. This resulted in the foundation of the International Catholic Migration Committee, with a subcommittee for Europe and regional and local committees, which cooperated closely with national committees of the CCMWE or even united with them, as was the case in the Netherlands. Regional Caritas organizations were often strongly involved with immigrants. The CCMWE in turn was discovering the importance of religion especially for the Muslim immigrants and workers. The CCMWE founded a subcommittee on Islamic matters recruiting its Christian members from among the CCIE. The request to do so came from the EKD, the Evangelical Church in Germany. The subcommittee published *Christians and Muslims Talking Together*.<sup>2</sup> This booklet became a truly ecumenical theological response to the new presence of Muslims in Western Europe.

The CCMWE gave a new mandate to a working party chaired by Michael Mildenerger, the Islam expert of the EKD, to explore “Islamic law and its significance for the situation of Muslim minorities in Europe.” The report was translated into French and German<sup>3</sup> and was the first of its kind in Europe. The third

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<sup>2</sup> The team was chaired by Jan Slomp. Kenneth Cracknell translated the original text, *Christen und Muslime im Gespräch*, and the final editing was done by Michael Mildenerger and Jürgen Micksch. It was also translated into and adapted in Danish, Dutch, French, Italian, and Swedish. Catholics and Protestants in Switzerland compiled their own German edition.

<sup>3</sup> The Dutch journal *Begrip Moslims Christenen* devoted a special issue to it. Its main author was Jørgen Nielsen, director of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian Muslim Relations, Selly Oak Colleges, University of Birmingham. The other members were Syed Mutawalli Darsh (originally from Egypt and director of the Sunni Shari‘a Council in London), Zaidi Imam Mehdi Razvi (from Rawalpindi on the staff of the Shi‘ite mosque in Hamburg), Jan Henningson (Arabist, Church of Sweden) and Jan Slomp (Islam desk of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands). The secretary of the

mandate dealt with the *education of Muslim children in European schools*.<sup>4</sup> In 1998 (24-26 November) the Council of Europe organized a seminar in Strasbourg on *Religion and the Integration of Immigrants*. Jørgen Nielsen and Hans Vöcking were invited as consultants (cf. *Islam in Europa*: 239-254). The CCMWE worked with a salaried staff, whereas the CCIE had honorary officers. The mandate of the CCMWE, however, was not limited to Muslim immigrant workers. The W (for “workers”) was dropped in due course. But this brings us well ahead of events, and we should return to the period preceding the first Pan-European conference of the CEC, 6-11 February 1978, in Salzburg, Austria on “The Church and the Muslim in Europe.”

### *Initiatives of the Secretariat pro non-Christianis in Rome*

The churches, in our view, gave the only correct initial response to the new wave of immigrants by giving priority to social activities in the CCMWE and the Catholic organization for migrants. From Jesus’ life and teaching, Christians learn that *diakonia*, *caritas*, service, loving one’s neighbour should always come before correctness of faith, belief and dogma. Orthopraxis should precede orthodoxy. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul emphasizes that, in the divine order, love surpasses faith and hope, although it should not be separated from the other two.

Because of the arrival of so many Muslim immigrants, priests and pastors in the pulpit and believers in the pew started raising theological questions about Muhammad, the Qur’an, etc. That is why the president of the Vatican’s Secretariat pro non-Christianis (founded in 1964 and as of 1969 called the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue), Pietro Rossano, called a first meeting with 19 representatives of episcopal conferences (members of the CCEE mentioned above) directly involved in Mödling near Vienna on 19-21 November 1976. The World Council of Churches sent three delegates, including John Taylor, in charge of its Islam desk, and Dick Mulder, then professor of Islamology at the VU University Amsterdam and moderator of the dialogue department of the WCC. We should also mention the names of those who would later attend other meetings dealing with Christian-Muslim relations. The Muslim speakers were the Bosnian scholar Smail Balic who lives and works in Vienna (Slomp 2009) and the Algerian Ali Merad, a professor in Lyon. From Germany came Muhammad Salim Abdullah, director of the Zentralinstitut Islam-Archiv in Soest (founded in 1927 in Berlin). This institute has rewarded deserving Jewish and Christian promoters of dialogue (Hagemann). By inviting Muslim

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CCMWE, Pieter Muller, attended *ex officio*. All four Christian members of this subcommittee of the CCMWE also represented their churches in the CCIE.

<sup>4</sup> The committee moderated by Gé M. Speelman organized an international conference in Driebergen (NL) with Muslim and Christian lecturers.

experts the organizers became trendsetters for later European church-related conferences on Islam.

In the meantime, the Episcopal conferences of Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain had approached the White Fathers (Society of Missionaries of Africa) to organize Islam desks in their respective churches. This resulted in the appointments of Charles Dekkers, Michel Lelong, Hans Vöcking, Piet Backx, and Emilio Galindo. Other countries followed. Similar appointments took place within several Protestant churches in Europe starting, chronologically, in 1976, with Jan Slomp (the Netherlands), Kenneth Cracknell (GB), Michael Mildenerger (Germany), and Jean-Claude Basset (Switzerland). Other churches appointed committees.

*Positive Response to Muslim Expectations and Wishes*

The main speaker in Vienna (1976) was Merad, who explained what Muslims expected from Christians. We can summarize the main thrust of his lecture from his published text (Merad 1977). Ali Merad declared himself to be speaking on behalf of the new European Muslims. He eloquently reminded the Roman Catholic Church of its declaration *Nostra Aetate* of 28 October 1965 by the Second Vatican Council, which made it clear that, since then, the Catholic Church has been anxious to seek dialogue with Muslims with the purpose of promoting mutual understanding, social justice, moral values, peace, and freedom. But he reminded his audience of other such initiatives by the World Council of Churches in Broumana (Lebanon) 1972, in Tripoli, 1976, Muslims and Christians together in Cordoba, 1974 (which was, by the way, followed by an even more important conference on Jesus and Muhammad in 1977), etc. In his lecture Merad presented a programme to address the most urgent needs of the Muslim communities. They are, he maintains, the new victims of the exploitative jungle of industrial societies. He welcomes the establishment of the Secretariat pour relations avec l'Islam of the Roman Catholic Church in France and other similar initiatives. He expected "the people of the Gospel" to respond positively to Muslim demands such as: (1) proper housing, (2) job security, (3) schooling of their children, (4) access to religious education in public schools, (5) facilities to worship and to celebrate Islamic festivals. He knows that many Muslims, who together with Jews and Christians are followers of Abraham, instinctively turn to their Christian friends for understanding when they demand to be treated as human beings. Merad suggested building a Europe-wide network of organizations to cope with the challenges presented by the arrival of so many new immigrants and called specialized academic and ecclesiastical institutions to provide reliable information on Islam in order to reduce prejudice, hatred, and injustice. He expected that a positive attitude from churches and Christians would not fail to impress Muslims and give them a more positive view of Christianity. These good experiences, he hoped, would lead to reconciliation between Christian Europe and the Muslim Third World.

He saw a role for Christian communities in the Near East as “indispensible mediators between Arab Islam and the West.” Crusades and colonialism were events of the past, and it was time for cooperation in a spirit of mutual esteem. He reminded Muslims of the Qur’anic statement: “And nearest among them in love to the believers thou wilt find those who say: ‘We are Christians’” (5:85; translation by Abdallah Yousuf Ali).

In retrospect, 35 years later, we come to the conclusion that Merad’s words were well heeded and that many of his wishes and proposals have become reality. Due to political events, the position of Christians in the Muslim world has, in the meantime, hardly changed for the better. The meeting in Vienna made the following four recommendations and calls for action. (1) Respect for the religious identity of Muslims demands a deeper knowledge of their religion (2) Efforts should be made to present both Islam and Christianity correctly and faithfully. (3) It is recommended that offices be set up within the churches in order to intensify meetings between those responsible for contacts in both religious communities. (4) A special joint responsibility is mentioned for Muslim students in European universities. The meeting is finally again reminded of the importance of the text of *Nostra Aetate* as a guideline for thought and action.

#### *Conference of European Churches Becomes Active*

In the 1970s the Conference of European Churches was not yet equipped to handle the new challenge some of its member churches were facing. How the CEC became involved is described by John Taylor, in charge of the Islam desk of the office for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies of the WCC. He writes:

An information consultation on the subject “The Church and the Muslim in Europe” was held in Salzburg from February 6-11, 1978. The prime mover behind this meeting was the European Liaison Committee of the Islam in Africa Project, founded in 1960 (now the Programme for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa, PROCMURA, with its head office in Nairobi, Kenya. It organizes conferences and training sessions in more than twenty sub-Saharan countries).

It (the European Liaison Committee) was responding to a challenge of the predominantly African members of the Council of the Islam in Africa Project who, while encouraging European interest in and support for the work in Africa, urged that the principle of “mission on all six continents” be applied in Europe where some churches were slow to relate in witness and service to their old and new Muslim neighbours. The World Council of Churches had already encouraged regional initiatives in Christian-Muslim dialogue in Asia, Africa and North America and welcomed any further initiative in Europe. It remained only for the Conference of European Churches, with its Protestant and Orthodox member churches spanning Eastern and Western Europe, to provide appropriate sponsorship with the European Liaison Committee of the Islam in Africa Project. (Taylor, 1978: 211)

Thus, invited by the CEC, 60 delegates from churches and missions plus staff, guests, press, radio, altogether 76 people came to Salzburg. Although it was



not a member of the CEC, the Roman Catholic Church was well represented. One speaker was Michael Fitzgerald, at that time director of the Institut Pontifical d'Études Arabes in Rome. Three Muslim speakers were invited: Ali Merad, Smail Balic, and Hadschi Azam Alyakbarov from Moscow.<sup>5</sup> There were no representatives from churches in the Muslim world.

Several delegates represented independent missions or had worked as missionaries in a Muslim country. The conference chose a qualified Islamicist, Bishop David Brown (UK), as its moderator. There were no negative views of Islam or Muslims. The Muslims who were present were surprised by the spirit of sympathy and solidarity with their plight. The conference benefitted from the fact that the Roman Catholic Church had spoken positively about Muslims and their faith in *Nostra Aetate*. Many Protestants had welcomed this declaration as well. On the Protestant side, various facts and events had contributed towards a more sympathetic understanding of Islam. The writings of the Anglican scholar and bishop Kenneth Cragg (b. 1913) deserve mention, especially his book, *The Call of the Minaret* (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1956). Within Greek Orthodoxy, the publications of Anastasios Yannoulatos, bishop and dean of the theological faculty in Athens, especially his *Islam* (in Greek: 1975; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1979), were influential. He took a very active part in this and later conferences of the CCIE.

*CEC Conference in Salzburg: Consensus on Action but Theological Deficit*

The participants of the conference in Bildungshaus Sankt Virgil were divided into four sections that dealt with similar subjects as those addressed at the Roman Catholic Consultation in Mödling mentioned above. Three group reports express the concerns of the members of the conference to work together with Muslims for a solution to common problems in the practical realms of human rights, such as religious liberty, housing, facilities for worship, education, mixed marriages, integration, discrimination, civic rights, rights of minorities, access to media, legal recognition (where applicable), evangelism and mission, etc. One of the groups described how Christians and Muslims endeavour to understand the implications of secularism and secularization for believers as individuals and groups. In a final appraisal, written by Slomp, it was said:

Christians and Muslims live together in the different nations of modern Europe; it is therefore imperative that they share work together in the development of harmonious societies in which every group finds justice, openness and opportunities to share fully in the life of the community.' (Conference of European Churches 1978: 9)

No agreement was reached on the question if churches should allow Muslims

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<sup>5</sup> Father Basil Osborne from Oxford conducted the Bible studies. Byron Haines, a former staff member of the Christian Study Centre in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, represented the new Islam desk of the National Council of Churches in the USA.

to use their buildings or on the sale of redundant churches to be converted into mosques.

Great emphasis was placed on the responsibility to prepare the receiving communities to accept Muslims, to meet new migrants at their point of need and to develop true encounter between Christians and Muslims. Despite the great consensus concerning actions to be taken by churches and Christians alone or with other social partners and, of course, if possible, with Muslims, the section dealing with Islam from a theological point of view failed to reach an agreement. Three reasons were given for this failure. The time was too short, the subject too complicated, and the diversity of theological views too great. Five members of this section tried to present a short theological statement for inclusion in the report, but the conference as a whole did not feel able to receive it. The moderator, David Brown, concluded that Muslims should not become the victims of our lack of theological unity vis-à-vis Islam. He encouraged the participants to start with the practical implications of the three section reports and to continue reflecting on theological matters. Despite its shortcomings, the outcome of this first pan-European consultation was encouraging if one takes into account that its planning committee had not tried to draft discussion papers for the four sections. One of the important results was also that, men and women who were active in Christian-Muslim relations in their own churches had been meeting from 1978 on, and thus the basis for a European network had been laid.

*Formation of the Consultative Committee on Islam in Europe of the CEC*

During the final session of the conference, the following motion was unanimously adopted: “We request the CEC to take measures to provide for an appropriate follow-up of this consultation on the basis of the issues raised by it...” “We further encourage the churches and interested church-related organizations to work at national and regional levels to coordinate and plan further action ....”

During the meeting of the praesidium of the CEC in Warsaw, 23-25 November 1978, the general secretary, Glen Garfield Williams, presented the above recommendations. The praesidium decided to institute a Consultative Committee on Islam in Europe, its mandate to be formulated by the forthcoming General Assembly of the CEC in October 1979 in Chania on the island of Crete.

In May 1978, Williams asked Slomp to become the secretary of the new committee. Initially, the CEC was strongly in favour of organizing such a committee as a joint venture with the CCEE. Therefore, Slomp and Michel Lelong PB, who was in charge of the Paris-based Secretariat pour relations avec l’Islam of the Roman Catholic Church in France, were asked by Williams to explore the possibilities for such a joint committee. In the first week of November 1978,

Lelong and Slomp paid a visit to the president of the CCEE, Archbishop Roger Etchegaray of Marseille. After a long discussion, it became clear that the president of the CCEE was not yet ready for a fully joint venture with the CEC. Cooperation between the two organizations had only just started (see Huot-Pleuroux 1995).

Eventually, the president of the CCEE declared himself prepared for a partial participation. If the CCEE had agreed to establish a joint committee on Islam in Europe it would have been obvious that the moderator should have been a Catholic, given the fact that the CEC praesidium had already appointed a Protestant secretary. David Brown of the Church of England became the first chairman of the CCIE. It was not easy to find candidates in the different denominations and in Eastern and Western Europe who combined churchmanship with knowledge about Islam and experience with Muslims. It turned out to be impossible to invite representatives of independent evangelical missions, with their outspoken objective to evangelize Muslims. On a personal level, good contacts with these organizations were maintained.<sup>6</sup> Williams, the general secretary of the CEC, attended the meetings *ex officio*. After his retirement he was succeeded by Jean Fischer. That turned out to be a wise move because none of us knew the ropes of the CEC or was aware of what would be feasible and possible within this organization. Five of the members were fluent in Arabic, which was the only common language among some members. Women were underrepresented. The European Liaison Committee of the Islam in Africa Project (now PROCMURA) did not send a consultant but requested the CCIE secretary to serve on its European Liaison Committee. No Muslims served as consultants on the committee.

*Mandate of the Consultative Committee on Islam in Europe 1979-1986 (CCIE)*

The framework for this committee was formulated during the VIIIth Assembly of the CEC in Chania, 18-25 October 1979. The minutes also reveal the mo-

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<sup>6</sup> There were three representatives from Orthodox churches: Andreas Mitsides from Cyprus, Archimandrite Augustine Nikitin, professor of church history in Lenin-grad, and Père Emil Roman from Romania but who lived in Switzerland. One Protestant came from a Communist country, Vlado L. Deutsch in Zagreb of the Evangelical Church in Croatia. O.T. Françoise Smyth-Florentin represented the Reformed Church of France, and Jan Henningson, an Arabist, the Lutheran Church of Sweden. Micksch attended on behalf of the Evangelical Church of Germany. The CCEE sent Lelong from Paris as a member and Vöcking as an observer. During the CCEE Assembly of 1-20 September 1983, Lelong was replaced by Vöcking and became a consultant. The following individuals also served as consultants: Stuart Brown of the Islam desk of the World Council of Churches, Nielsen of the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian Muslim Relations in Birmingham, and Pieter Muller of the CCMWE (see above). CEC committees try to find a balance of regions and denominations.

tives of the CEC behind this committee:

6.1 In the light of the presence of about five million Muslims in Western Europe in addition to the many millions who have lived for centuries in other parts of our continent, the Church is faced with new and unaccustomed challenges.

6.2 We must face up to the question of our understanding of a religious minority in our midst, the question of the content and form of Christian witness to Muslims, the defence of their religious freedom and also the question of assistance in their legal and social integration in our societies.

6.3 We welcome the fact that the first all-European consultation on Islam took place in Salzburg in 1978 and recommend that work on this question be continued by the newly constituted CEC committee for the questions of Islam.

6.4. We propose:

- that the CEC should make available to its member churches informative material providing guidance on Islam and relations with Muslims as well as about other European churches' experience in dealing with Muslims;

- that the CEC should cooperate closely with existing committees and working groups on Islamic questions, especially with the WCC's Sub-Unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, with the Churches' Committee on Migrant Workers in Europe, with the Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian Muslim Relations in Birmingham and with the Council of Roman Catholic Bishops' Conferences (CCEE);

- that the CEC should raise and keep alive in its member churches the question of religious and social discrimination against Muslims in our continent. Appropriate mission to Muslims in Europe should include cooperation, help and discussion;

- that the CEC should draw the attention of member churches to the repercussions of the relation between Christians and Muslims in other parts of the world;

- that the CEC, in dealing with questions of relations between Christians and Muslims, should keep in contact with churches and church councils with relevant experience outside Europe.

The mandate would be in force until the next general assembly of the CEC, which turned out to be until the assembly in Stirling, Scotland in 1986. Proposals in Chania to drop the word "mission" in the mandate and to include the word "dialogue" did not achieve a majority. The "consultative" nature of the committee was stressed, implying that the committee was not supposed to initiate contacts with Muslim organizations in Europe itself. Yet the CCIE organized, whenever possible in the context of all its meetings, local encounters with Muslim leaders, especially at the request of members who in their own countries had fewer opportunities for contacts.

#### *The CCIE under Moderator David Brown (1980-1982)*

The first meeting of the CCIE took place in Frankfurt (Germany) in March 1980, the second in Zagreb (18-20 March 1981), the third in January 1982 in Paris, and the fourth in November 1983 in Zeist, the Netherlands. The meetings in Frankfurt, Zagreb, and Paris were chaired by David Brown. Brown's

sudden death on 13 July 1982 came as a heavy loss.<sup>7</sup> Under his chairmanship the new CCIE had prepared its first publication, *The Churches and Islam in Europe* [II] [Geneva 1982], with translations in French and German). Its contents shows that the CCIE was taking its mandate seriously, with contributions by, for example, John Taylor (WCC), Byron Haines (USA), Nielsen (Birmingham), and reports on regional activities in the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Denmark, and the Netherlands. But the most important contribution “Matters for Reflection” (47-57) was by Brown, which turned out to be his very last essay. Reading it again after thirty years, I maintain that it has lost hardly any relevance. A reprint would be worthwhile!

In his reflections, Brown addresses, without mentioning it explicitly, the failure of the consultation in Salzburg to come to theological terms with Islam. The CCIE had asked him to make this first move. After describing the new inter-religious situation and the new theological predicament in Europe, Brown brings in his personal contacts with Muslims as a missionary in Khartoum. Islam can never be fully understood by an outsider. Textbook knowledge always has to be complemented by encounter. His reflections are subdivided under five headings: respect, knowledge, honesty, openness, and hope. Under the heading “respect,” he reminds his readers of the daily prayers of praise rendered by Muslims to God in the Sura al-Fatiha of the Qur’an. He quotes the text of *Nostra Aetate*, which begins with the words; “Upon the Muslims, too, the Church looks with esteem.” In a section on “knowledge,” he pleads for an awareness of the principles of Islamic teaching about God: that “God,” the Ground of all being, is the creator and sustainer of the universe, the immediate cause of everything that happens, that God controls history and will bring it to an end at the last day, that prayer is heard and answered by God, that human beings are answerable to him and will have to render account at the last day, that God is served by the angels, that God revealed his will to humankind through his signs in nature and through prophets like Abraham, Moses, and Jonah and through the scriptures associated with them, that God finally revealed his will through the Qur’an and through Muhammad, the Seal and last of the prophets. Under the heading “honesty,” Brown warns Christians “not to water down the dogmas which differ from the affirmations of the Qur’ân.” Under openness, he invites believers to learn from one another in a spiritual emulation. Finally, Brown hopes that Muslims will continue to honour Christ and be attracted to him. David Brown’s eschatological expectation is found in Ephesians 1:10 when, at the end, God will bring “all things (also all things Islamic transformed by Him) in heaven and on earth into a unity in Christ.” Brown elaborated on this view in *All Their Splendour. World Faiths: The Way to Community* (1982) and previous books.

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<sup>7</sup> J.M. Gaudeul devoted an obituary on Bishop David Brown in *Islamochristiana* (8 [1982]: 249) in which he also mentioned his importance for the CEC.

*Intermezzo on the “Journées d’Arras” and Christian-Muslim Relations*

Cooperation between those in Europe on behalf of the churches engaged with Muslims could not wait until the churches had organized their committees. Semi-official initiatives for cooperation and exchange were taken in various countries. The “Journées d’Arras” should be mentioned in the context of this essay. We will see below that, since 2009, “Journées d’Arras” has become the most important venue for meetings of church professionals involved in Christian-Muslim encounter, having been the platform for specialists already since 1980. In 2004, Penelope Johnstone (UK), one of its founding members—like the authors of this article—described its nature and activities:

The Journées d’Arras have taken place every year, in May or June, since 1980. They bring together a number of Christians from different countries in Europe, working within their own churches concerned with Christian-Muslim relations. The first session was held at the small town Arras in Northern France, and although the place of meeting has changed, the name has been retained. The name Journées indicates the origin of these sessions, the longer established biennial ‘Journées Romaines’, which were held from 1956 until the year 1999. It was natural that participants at the JRs should gravitate towards others from their own region, as occurred with the development of separate groups: from the Maghreb, Middle East, Asia and in this case, Europe. The then Bishop of Arras Gerard Huyghe, generously offered the facilities of his diocese. Thus it was that in May 1980 a small group from six countries met in the former seminary, now the Centre Culture et Foi, in Arras.... The planning and organization of the first meeting was carried out by Hans Vöcking at CIBEDO (Frankfurt), helped in subsequent years by a committee of two or three elected members. (Johnstone 2004)

At present, the Arras meetings take place all over Europe. The last meeting in Oslo in June 2011 had more than 40 participants from 17 countries, including Romania, Russia, and Turkey. The language of communication has shifted from French to English. The present convenor is Martin Affolderbach, the Islam expert at the EKD. From time to time, participants send recommendations to the various churches. For example, the following was sent in 1987: “We urge all in positions of leadership to recognize that the subject (Islam and Muslims) needs to be put higher on the agenda of the churches.” In 1991, it was recommended that material be prepared to present Christianity to Muslims. Reports of the Journées d’Arras were published in *Islamochristiana*. Several subjects on the agenda of the CCIE were dealt with first at the Journées d’Arras.

*Second CEC Consultation on Islam in Europe St. Pölten, 5-10 March 1984*

With Michael Mildenerger as chair, the CEC could hold a second major CEC consultation on “Christian and Muslim Witness to God in a Secular Europe” (St. Pölten, Austria, March 1984).<sup>8</sup> Hasan Askari, a Shi’ite Muslim from India,

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<sup>8</sup> Of the 80 participants, half were delegates from CEC member churches in 20 countries. 11 were women. The Roman Catholic Church sent a strong delegation, in-

presented a Bible study, and the missiologist Anton Wessels (Amsterdam) a Qur'anic study. Smail Balic from Austria delivered a lecture. During the discussion, it became evident that S.M Darsh, another prominent Muslim, did not agree with Balic's view that, for Muslims in Europe, *Shari'ah* should be limited to ethical prescriptions and rituals (Slomp 2008). The Jewish Arabist and author of a widely read biography of the prophet Muhammad, Maxime Rodinson from Paris, introduced the subject of secularism. The secular context continues to be a permanent background for interfaith dialogue. Members of the CCIE had written preparatory papers for the four groups. Lelong wrote the paper for group 2: "How do we Christians theologically understand Islam?" This had been the main item on the unfinished agenda of the consultation in Salzburg in 1978. During the first session of group 2, the discussion was very inconclusive. Then the moderator Ulrich Schoen came up with the very good idea of concentrating discussion on the following basic questions: (1) Is the Holy Spirit at work in Islam? (2) Can a Muslim be saved as a Muslim? (3) Is it God's will that every Muslim become a Christian? (4) Is the God of the Muslims the same as the God of the Christians? (5) Can Christians recognize Muhammad as a prophet? (6) Do Christians and Muslims form a community of faith under the sovereignty of the will of God? These are questions, Schoen explained, that are asked not only by theologians but also by ordinary Christians. The group formulated answers to five of the six questions (lack of time prevented them from dealing with question 6). Although all the answers are interesting and to some extent controversial, during and after the consultation question and answer 5 drew more attention than any other statement made during the consultation. For that reason we will quote it in full:

Question and answer 5: Can Christians recognize Muhammad as a prophet?

One current in Christian thought has consistently honoured Muhammad as a preacher of repentance in the service of the One God. It is uncharitable and unnecessarily offensive to condemn him out of hand as a false prophet or worse. Christians must always remember Christ's injunction: "Judge not that ye not be judged" ([Matthew] 7:2). The Muslims revere a succession of holy prophets from Adam to Muhammad who were entrusted with an infallible message. On the other hand Christians respect the Old Testament prophets as fallible yet inspired messengers of repentance in the service of the One God. The New Testament writers continue this tradition, speaking of 'the spirit of prophecy' which God "shall pour upon all flesh" (Acts 2:17). It is therefore possible for Christians to recognize Muhammad as a prophet but only in the context of this tradition. We must nevertheless ensure that our Muslim friends understand the subtle differences between the two perspectives, for Christians believe that revelation comes from one who is greater than all the prophets, "being the brightness of His glory and the express

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cluding the head of the section on Islam of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the American scholar, Thomas Michel SJ. Four prominent Muslims attended as guests, among them Mehdi Razvi and S.M. Darsh.

image of His person ... and has by Himself purged our sins" (Hebrews 1:3). (Conference of European Churches 1985: 38-39.)

Question and answer 5 was going to play a role in the discussion on the prophethood of Muhammad in Christian theology initiated in the writings of Anton Wessels, Kenneth Cragg, Hans Küng, Reinhard Leuze, and others. David Kerr and Jan Slomp dealt explicitly with this statement in St. Pölten. Kenneth Cragg's *Muhammad and the Christian: A Question of Response* was published just after the consultation. It reinforced the argument formulated in a rather extempore way in St. Pölten. Negative reactions came from the Evangelical Church in Greece and from Roman Catholic participants from the Middle East during the Journées Romaines of 1985. They had asked the secretary of the CCIE to explain the statement about the prophethood of Muhammad in St. Pölten. These Catholic Christians expressed a pastoral concern, saying that by recognizing Muhammad as *a* (not *the*) prophet, the fence between the two religions would become too low and consequently crossed too easily. This might cause confusion and result in even more Christians leaving the churches for Islam. It may be a comfort to them that not a single church within the CEC has ever put the subject of Muhammad's prophethood on its agenda.

All CEC conferences take place within a context of devotions and Bible study. It is therefore appropriate to quote the first of the two prayers printed at the end of the report of St. Pölten. It expresses the mood of the conference:

Lord, as divided Christians we confess to you that we cannot yet give witness to you in unity. We are deeply aware and are concerned that divisions still persist between us and our Muslim neighbors. All our human efforts to overcome these divisions, to create understanding and to build bridges are to no avail, if your Holy Spirit is not at work. (Conference of European Churches 1985: 58)

#### *Towards Closer Cooperation between CEC and CCEE*

At the end of the consultation in St. Pölten it became obvious that the theological answers formulated in a provisional way needed "further elaboration in our theological training centres, because our future ministers must be able to give guidance to their parishioners who are meeting Muslims" (Report 17). The moderator of the CCIE, Michael Mildenerger, declared during the meeting of the praesidium and the Advisory Committee of the CEC in May 1984 in Les Avants, Switzerland:

From the experience of St Pölten, it seems to be one of the most important tasks to get into touch with theological faculties and academies. There were few theological teachers and students present in St Pölten. Yet there is a big gap between academic theology and the needs of the churches concerning the Christian-Muslim encounter. This applies in particular to systematic theology. The Consultative Committee on Islam in Europe will have to consider carefully how to move in this direction which seems vital to the future of Christian-Muslim relations in Europe.

On 10 October 1984 the members of the Consultative Committee on Islam in



Europe of the CEC met with the staff of the Council for Interreligious Dialogue in Rome. Two items dominated the agenda: (1) the necessity to support local churches and parishes spiritually and theologically and (2) how the CEC and the Roman Catholic Church in Europe could intensify their cooperation in this respect.<sup>9</sup> On 1 June 1987, the new joint Islam in Europe Committee (IEC) of the CEC and the CCEE was founded. The executive committee held its first meeting 19-10 October 1987 in Frankfurt. At the first full committee meeting in April 1984, the mandate of the committee was to answer the question how, in the light of the presence of Muslims in Europe, teaching about Islam could be given its proper place in the training of pastoral workers in Europe. The new IEC did not have to start from scratch here. The Journées d'Arras had already devoted a conference to this subject. So did the Interfaith Committee of the British Council of Churches in *Theology on Full Alert*, edited by Kenneth Cracknell and Christopher Lamb. The focus of the IEC was to find creative ways to integrate Islamic dimensions in various theological disciplines. Something more than comparative religion or comparative theology was intended. Islamic studies were to aim at a deeper understanding of the issues at stake. The encounter with Muslims and writings about Islam during 1400 years of contact, conflict, and confrontation as well as some friendly encounters should receive attention in lectures on church history. Biblical studies might allow room for Qur'anic studies. The main idea was to underline Islam's possible impact in every branch of Christian theology.

After the full committee met in the Reformed Mission House in Oegstgeest, the Netherlands, three more conferences were planned in different areas of Europe. A special effort was made to invite professors of theology with a special interest in the subject matter. The first was held in Gazzada, near Milan in Italy, 12-17 April 1989. Michel Gagnon of the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI) dealt with revelation and prophecy, Islam and the Christian mysteries, and religious anthropology. Anton Wessels from the (Reformed) VU University in Amsterdam spoke on mission and dialogue. The conference also issued a statement in the context of the worldwide debate on Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (ISCH15 [1989]: 191-92).<sup>10</sup> In June

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<sup>9</sup> An ad hoc working party was appointed consisting of Ivo Fürer, Hans Vöcking, and Michel Serain for the CCEE and Glen Garfield Williams OKR, Michael Mildenberger, and Jan Slomp for the CEC. Mildenberger presented its plans to the joint meeting of the leadership of the CEC and CCEE in January 1986. In September 1986 the ninth Assembly of the CEC in Stirling accepted these proposals. Vöcking became its secretary and Slomp its moderator. Since it was felt that both honorary officers could not come from Germany, Mildenberger, had to step down.

<sup>10</sup> *Islamochristiana* (ISCH), the most quoted source in this article is a publication of the Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e d'Islamistica (PISAI) Viale di Trastevere 89, 00153 Roma, Italy, [islamochristiana@pisai.it](mailto:islamochristiana@pisai.it). Since 1978 this journal has published

1990 the IEC held a conference in Leningrad (St. Petersburg), as the guest of Metropolitan Alexy. The conference took place in the Theological Academy in Leningrad. Augustin Nikitin spoke on the “Russian Orthodox Church and Islam,” and Anastasios Yannoulatos of the Greek Orthodox Church on “Dialogue and Mission with a Special Reference to Islam and Eastern Orthodoxy.” Franjo Topic of the Catholic Seminary in Sarajevo spoke on “Some Parallels in Christian and Islamic Morality.” After the conference, a delegation visited churches and Islamic centres in Uzbekistan.

The concluding conference took place in Birmingham. After an introductory lecture by the moderator (Slomp 2003), Claude Geffré OP from Paris spoke on “La portée théologique du dialogue islamo-chrétien,” and Theo Sundermeier from Heidelberg on “Christian Belief and the Non-Christian Religions: A Protestant Survey as to their Relation.” The participants were divided into groups and drafted recommendations on exegesis, dogmatics, pastoral work, history of the church, ethics, and mission and dialogue. The final report, *The Presence of Muslims in Europe and the Theological Training of Pastoral Workers* (Slomp and Vöcking 1991), was published in English, French, German, Dutch, Italian, Russian, and Spanish. Committee members organized conferences with professors of theology in their respective countries. These conferences were not that well attended. Officers of the committee were invited for lectures inside and outside Europe from the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, etc. The subject remained on the agenda of the IEC until its dissolution in January 19-21 2009 in Munich.

The second mandate started in Limassol in 1993. Vöcking became moderator and Jean-Claude Basset from Geneva secretary. The IEC had been reduced in size: six members each from the CEC and the CCEE plus consultants. In Limassol the IEC met with the dialogue committee of the Middle East Council of Churches. Penelope Johnstone introduced the work of the IEC (Johnstone 1998). In Sofia (Bulgaria) the IEC met with Muslim and Christian professors of theology but in Cordoba (Spain) only with Christian professors. The Muslims did not turn up. The drafting of a paper on “Reciprocity in Christian Muslim Dialogue” took a long time and passionate discussion before it was finally approved in March 1995 and distributed in several languages, such as English, German, French, Italian, and Dutch. Part of the new mandate was also the preparation of a brochure on *Marriages between Christians and Muslims: Pastoral Guidelines for Christians and Churches in Europe* (1998)<sup>11</sup>—an issue that has attracted much attention, also in Muslim circles.

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reports of almost all the meetings and conferences of the Islam in Europe Committee.

<sup>11</sup> The first general draft was written by Slomp following a Dutch model. Vöcking wrote the section on Catholic canon law and the Greek expert on Islam, Gregorio Ziaka from Saloniki, the section on orthodoxy. Christopher Lamb took care of the final

The third mandate started in 1998 with the co-moderators Vöcking and C. van 't Leven of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (later part of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands). She served until 2001 and was succeeded by OKR Heinz Klautke of the EKD. The secretariat alternated between St. Gallen (CCEE) and Geneva (CEC). During the meeting in Rome (14-17 January 1999) interreligious prayer and the “heart and soul of Europe” were on the agenda (ISCH 25 [1999]: 178). The major emphasis during the period ending in 2004 was on Eastern Europe, especially on Albania with its Christian minority in an ex-Communist Muslim country and on Bosnia. The conference in Sarajevo was prepared with Muslims. More than 80 delegates arrived for four days on 11 September 2001, when the Twin Towers in New York were destroyed. This event marked the conference and strengthened the determination to decide for a common future of working together for peace, justice, and reconciliation. This takes us to the final message (ISCH 28 [2002]:166-68).

During the period of the final mandate 2005-2009 Vöcking and Affolderbach were co-moderators. The most striking event during this period was a conference sponsored by the European Union and organized by the IEC and a number of Muslim experts. The preparatory consultation took place in Esztergom in Hungary, 17-20 April 2008. On the agenda was also the letter from the 138 Muslim scholars to church leaders and the Muslim Charter signed in January 2008 by 400 Muslim associations in Europe (ISCH 34 [2008]: 211-12). The last major conference of the IEC in Brussels/Malines dealt with: “Being a Citizen in Europe and a Person of Faith.” The majority of the Muslims are no longer immigrants: they have become citizens. But the number of Muslim refugees is still increasing. During its last session in Munich, 19-21 January 2009, the CRME declared that the conference in Brussels

provided an important boost for future work. European society has become multi-religious and in this new context Christians and Muslims must witness to their faith in one God in order to contribute in a responsible manner, through their faith, to the shaping of society. (ISCH 35 [2009]: 244)

#### *Tentative Conclusions: What about the Future?*

What was possible and what not? It is not possible to evaluate the impact of the activities and publications of the three successive committees of the CEC and CCEE, the CCIE, the IEC, and the CRME on the leadership of the re-

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editing of the English edition. Translations were made into French, German and Italian. The Italian edition was even reprinted in 2000 (Religione e Sette). Muslim interest was shown by printing the major part in the *Journal for Muslim Minority Affairs* 20 (2000): 147-60.

spective churches and on the Islam desks of churches in countries with large Muslim communities. Since European cooperation started in 1976 no inquiries to that extent were ever made among the 125 member churches of the CEC and the 37 episcopal conferences of the CCEE. After all, only about 20 countries sent representatives to its conferences and only 17 countries had representatives as members of the committees. Reports on countries are an essential part of the agenda of the “Journées d’Arras.” The agenda of the CCIE and its successors consisted of working and planning in line with the mandates given since 1986 jointly by the leadership of the CEC and the CCEE. The authors are therefore aware of the limitations of the above survey. The history of the involvement of European churches with Islam and Muslims in Europe has still to be written. This history has also to take account of the engagements of many lay people in those areas of our cities and towns where Muslim immigrants have settled. While writing the above pages we had no access to all the respective country reports. Surveying them would have gone far beyond the scope of this article. The authors hope that future researchers will be able to benefit from the observations made by two insiders.

#### About the Future

Taking into consideration that several churches have well-functioning Islam desks and that the Journées d’Arras have become the ideal meeting point for sharing and comparing, the CEC and the CCEE decided to discontinue its joint Islam in Europe Committee. The CCEE is planning to organize meetings periodically (every two or three years) with its delegates responsible for relations with Muslims in Europe. The first of these meetings has already taken place in Bordeaux, 27-28 April 2009 (ISCH 34 [2009]: 245-47). The CEC and CCEE together want to organize a joint conference with Muslims every two or three years on ethical or societal questions.

The authors urge that to help prevent Islamists from becoming anti-Jewish or specialists on Judaism anti-Islamic, churches should try to link their concerns with both Jews and Muslims in creative ways. The authors want to emphasize that every generation of *Christian theologians* has to come to grips with the many theological challenges that Muslim theologians have placed before the church of Jesus Christ for 14 centuries. This is a permanent theological task that cannot be taken over by sociologists, phenomenologists or other academic disciplines. To borrow again the phrase coined in Britain: theology has to remain on full alert. It is the task of the church leaders to see to it that this task is not neglected.

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