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8. Vollversammlung der Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa
Basel, 13.–18. September 2018

Protestant Perspectives on Religious Plurality in Europe

Final Version 2018

Approved by the 8ᵗʰ General Assembly

Original Version: English

Gemeinschaft Evangelischer Kirchen in Europa (GEKE)
Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE)
Communion d'Eglises Protestantes en Europe (CEPE)

CONTENT

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, in Europe, interaction between people of different faiths has become part of everyday life. For churches, this raises the question of how to constructively shape inter-religious relations and how to view such relations theologically. Due to the established presence of Muslims in many European countries, the definition of the relationship with Islam plays an especially important role. But Eastern religions also attract the attention of many people. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church has issued several documents on this array of questions[1], whereas many churches of the Reformation in Europe are still in the process of establishing their position. This is for both practical and theological reasons.

The *historical-practical reasons* lie in the fact that Protestant Christianity has for centuries been located mainly in countries of Central and Northern Europe, as well as the USA. There was little inclination to engage in interreligious relations. During the past decades, the situation has changed significantly. The centre of gravity of Christianity is shifting from the North to the South – to sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, South-East Asia, where it finds itself involved in intensive relationships with other religions. On the other hand, Europe is becoming more and more multi-religious.

The *theological reasons* lie, among other things, in the focus on Christ ("*solus Christus*") and the Bible ("*sola Scriptura*") in the churches of the Reformation. Protestant theology emphasised the particularity of the revelation in Christ, and stressed that the work of the Holy Spirit was strictly linked to the proclamation of the Word. The emphasis of Lutheran theology, in particular, on the distinction between Law and Gospel has sometimes led to characterising Judaism and Islam as "legalistic religions". The doctrine of God's election in Christ that is important for Reformed theology could be (mis-) understood as assuming that only truly believing Christians could be regarded as elected.

From the 1960s onwards, remarkable changes in the area of interreligious relationships occurred in Protestant churches. "Dialogue" (rather than apologetics or mission) has now become the paradigm for determining the relations to other religions. That change of paradigm has posed various practical and theological questions in answer to which individual churches, communions of churches and the World Council of Churches (WCC) have issued statements. Such

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[1] Francesco Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II, 1963-2005*, Boston, Pauline Books & Media 2006; CIBEDO e.V. (ed.), Dokumente der katholischen Kirche zum Dialog mit dem Islam, compiled by Timo Güzelmansur, Regensburg, Pustet 2009.

1 statements on the theological, fundamental questions of interreligious dialogue have, however,

2 frequently caused passionate debates within the churches. These debates disclose the need for

3 clarification.

4 The individual churches respond to the described challenges in very different ways. Some are

5 so overwhelmed with practical difficulties or with reforming their structures that practical and

6 theological work on 'external relationships' play a comparatively less prominent role. However,

7 the mission of the church also explicitly includes this 'outside'. Redefining and shaping the rela-

8 tionship with other religious communities is a part of the church's testimony in the world.

9 The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) has yet to determine its position as

10 regards dialogue and theology of religions. Currently, important statements exist only concern-

11 ing the relation to Judaism.[2] Due to the special relationships between the Church and Israel,

12 these statements cannot be transferred directly to other religious communities. There is a par-

13 ticular need for clarification regarding the relationship with Islam, which touches questions of a

14 great theological scope. Specific interreligious relationships must be discussed within a compre-

15 hensive theological horizon. The CPCE has already dealt with the question of "mission" in the

16 document *Evangelising: Protestant perspectives for the Churches in Europe.*[3]

17 In Florence in 2012, the General Assembly of the CPCE decided to launch a study process on

18 the subject of "Plurality of Religions".[4] The following paper is the first outcome of that process. It

19 is a draft, and intends to promote further discussion. It does not deal with specific interreligious

20 relationship (for example to Islam), but with the question of religious plurality in general. It in-

21 cludes biblical and historical aspects, as well as viewpoints from systematic theology. At the

22 end, the paper shares reflections on the churches' possible contributions on how to live together

23 in religiously plural societies.

24 The term "plurality" describes a situation in which more than one entity of a certain category (in

25 this case religion) exist in the same space. "Plurality" is often used synonymously with "diversi-

26 ty", referring to possible differences between the diverse entities. Nowadays, "plurality" is often

27 used to describe the factual diversity, while the term "pluralism" implies a conceptual dimension.

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[2] See in particular: Leuenberg Documents Vol. 6: *Church and Israel. A Contribution from the Reformation Churches in Europe to the Relationship between Christians and Jews*, Mandated by the Executive Committee of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship edited by Helmut Schwier, Frankfurt/M., Lembeck 2001.

[3] Accepted and made its own by the General Assembly of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe in Budapest in September 2006, Mandated by the Council of the CPCE, edited by Michael Bünker and Martin Friedrich.

[4] Final Report 7th General Assembly, no. 3.2 (in: Michael Bünker/ Bernd Jaeger (eds.): *Free for the Future. Protestant Churches in Europe*, Leipzig 2013, pp. 262-263.

"Pluralism" gives a perspective on how that diversity should be dealt with, i.e. the notion "pluralism" presupposes a reflection and a normative judgment on how the different entities should relate to one another. Today, "pluralism" is used to describe acceptance of plurality and arrangements for respecting diverse entities within that plurality. In the case of religious pluralism, two important perspectives provide normative understandings: the legal perspective, and the theological perspective. From a legal perspective, the acceptance of religious plurality implies providing legitimacy to different religious entities, and guaranteeing them equal legal treatment. From a theological perspective, the discourse on religious pluralism has triggered lively debates about what acknowledging and accepting religious plurality means. There are varying degrees and varying ways of acceptance, thus different concepts of pluralism. The present paper provides "Protestant Perspectives on Religious Plurality in Europe". It begins with describing the factual diversity, and then it articulates Protestant theological insights that give orientation in dealing with religious plurality. In so doing, it contributes to the conceptual debate on religious pluralism.

The paper starts with a description of "religions in Europe", which also addresses the question of defining "religion" and "Europe". It then gives an overview of the documents issued by different European Protestant churches on that topic. That overview shows how burning the issue is, and how much work has already been done. The following part lays a theological foundation: it centres on the *radical grace* of the triune God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The last part reflects on the practical consequences and ways of living together in religiously plural societies.

2. Religions in Europe

Before going any further, some clarification is needed. However, defining religion today is a nearly impossible task. Far from only representing the administrative registration of people in a religious institution, religion has nowadays increasingly become a personal or individual matter. Many new concepts ("bricolage", multiple belongings, church (s)hopping, fuzzy religion) are all illustrations of the difficulty to grasp the relation of individuals to religion as a system or institution. Individuals also have in different modes of connecting to religious beliefs, and differ in their spirituality and practice. This document is not the place to discuss the matter at length; therefore, suffice it to say that this text will be about "religions" rather than "religion". When the term "religion" is used in this document, it will be taken in its most widespread understanding: that is the relationship of human beings to the divine, generally organised in a system of belief, ritual practices and moral codes. It will refer here both to the personal practices related to faith, and to the shared system of belief. Understanding religions as social phenomena, we are not referring to religion as personal spirituality, but to religious communities as social entities.

2.1   Defining Europe?

In recent history, Christian churches have supported the idea of Europe: Catholics and Protestants have long been working at building a European network. The *Conference of European Churches* (CEC), bringing together Protestants, Anglicans and Orthodox, was created in 1959; the *Council of European Bishops' Conferences* (CCEE) was founded in 1971[M1][N2]. The *Community of Protestant Churches*, based on the Leuenberg Agreement (1973) gradually built up a European awareness among the Protestant churches. Obviously, however, each of these institutions refers to a different understanding of Europe, if only because this understanding has evolved through time.

So how can Europe be defined? The word clearly refers to a group of countries; but this ensemble is far from being a homogeneous set. The high diversity of the situations and of the historical journeys of each country renders it rather difficult to give a general survey. Firstly, one would need to make sure that everybody is defining what Europe is in the same way, and in any case is in agreement with what its territory is. There is more than one definition: the geographical limits can be taken into account; the political organisation can be the reference; one could also refer to a common culture or a certain set of values. These questions cannot be dealt with here[5], so "Europe" will be used in its common understanding: that is, not resting on a political (the European Union or the Council of Europe), economic (European Economic Area), or mythical ("Mother Europe") definition, but rather on a broad geographical understanding.

It is also difficult to try to give a general picture of religious belonging in Europe. Of course, a number of surveys provide information concerning the religious affiliation of the European population[6]. For instance, the *European Values Survey* conducted in 2008 in 47 countries[7], reveals that more than 3/4 of the population in Europe identify with a religion even though this may well represent very different commitments and practices in each country; *Pew Research Center* claims that there are in Europe some 18% of non-believers (in 2015). According to the *European*

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[5]   Cf. Martin Friedrich et al. (Ed.): Theology for Europe. Perspectives of Protestant Churches, Frankfurt/M 2006.

[6]   Sources of information on religious belonging in Europe are mostly results of the major European studies: European Values Studies, European Social Survey, International Social Survey Programme, Eurobarometer. *Pew Research Forum* also provides data. For further information on sources concerning religion in Europe, see the Eurel website (more precisely http://www.eurel.info/spip.php?rubrique573).

[7]   Albania, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Republic of Montenegro, Netherlands, Northern Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Republic of Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine.

Values Survey, globally speaking, a good third of the religious Europeans (36.7%) are Roman Catholics, a smaller third (30%) Orthodox, Muslim (15%) and Protestant (14.5 %) believers are found nearly in the same numbers, while Jews, Hindus and Buddhists represent each less than 1 % of the population.

However, this information provides a rough picture, and such a depiction of religion in Europe can only be a starting point. In fact, depending on the countries taken into account, one can find very different results. Contemporary Europe covers countries with different religious settings and historical backgrounds.

The Protestant Reformation started in that part of Europe which was nearly entirely Catholic at that time (the non-Catholics being mostly members of the Jewish minority), and led to a diversification of the former religious homogeneity. There were some precursory movements to the Reformation with Peter Waldes, John Wycliff, Jan Hus. However, the writings of Martin Luther in Germany are commonly understood as marking the start of the Reformation, which quickly spread over Europe. The history of the propagation of the Protestant ideas and the gradual establishing of Protestantism in different trends and institutions is a long, complex, and often contentious one. The legal status, political influence and social weight of religious group are nowadays very diverse, as a result of a troubled history and of (often conflictual) relations between minority and majority religions. Politically the Reformation caused conflicts which in the end resulted in a new political order in Europe. The religious differences were fought out in various religious wars which finally came to an end with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

Today Protestantism finds itself in very different situations, depending on the country. In Europe, one can find some countries which have remained mainly Catholic (and in which Protestantism is a very small minority, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Poland, for instance), others which had become predominantly Protestant (Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Scotland…), and those which have established, smoothly or painfully, the coexistence of both traditions (Germany, The Netherlands, Switzerland, or England, where the particular nature of the Reformation has resulted in a Church of England which has kept Catholic and Reformed features, alongside smaller denominations derived from Reformed traditions or from the Anglican one, such as the Methodist Church). The Eastern part of Europe was mostly under the influence of Orthodoxy and e.g. Greece, Romania, Russia or Bulgaria are predominantly Orthodox. In South Eastern Europe, because of the historical spread of the Ottoman Empire, some regions have a long-standing Muslim tradition (such as in Bosnia-Herzegovina), or are predominantly Muslim (Albania). In many places, there is a long history of presence of Muslim groups (such as the Tatars in several countries); however, Islam is a minority in most European countries.

1 The main religious group differs thus according to each European country. The importance giv-
2 en to religion also varies, with some countries being very secular while others remain deeply
3 religious. Many European countries are currently experiencing troubled times as a direct result
4 of undergoing years of Communist regime, which others never went through. This regime tend-
5 ed to control religion, and even tried to destroy the religious institutions (e. g. Albania after
6 1961). The sudden freedom of religion that followed the fall of the regime led to an important rise
7 in religious practice in several countries (Ukraine, Bulgaria, Hungary). This surge may also be
8 caused by the economic crisis and the difficulty of making a living which could be leading young
9 people to turn back to religion (as in Albania). Finally, we should also mention that the migration
10 trends are currently bringing to Europe people from Africa, Asia, America and the Middle East,
11 causing the European countries to become a place of encounter between people who express
12 and experience their individual religion in very different ways. This evolution of Europe does not
13 facilitate comparative studies of its recent history: since Europe has not throughout the years
14 always meant the same group of countries, general conclusions are difficult to draw. The global
15 picture can be affected by including, or not, either a more religious country (Ireland for instance)
16 or a more secular one (such as Sweden); suffice it to say that among the recent entrants to the
17 European Union, one can find the most religious country of Europe (Poland) and the least reli-
18 gious (Estonia).

19 ## 2.2   Status and place of religion in European societies

20 Regardless of the variations from one country to another, nevertheless – although they can be
21 considerable – all the countries of Europe share a common reference point and experience simi-
22 larly a changing situation. The common reference point is the legal affirmation of the freedom of
23 religion or belief of individuals[8], which is accepted throughout Europe even if not fully respected
24 everywhere. The similarity between the countries of Europe is that their religious setting is
25 changing, and often changing very quickly.[9] Similarity, however, stops there: the change does
26 not affect all the countries in the same way, or at the same speed. It is not expressed similarly,
27 and does not always have identical causes or consequences. General tendencies affecting sev-
28 eral countries can, nevertheless, be described. Firstly, a change in the religion-politics relation is

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[8] See article 9 of the *European Convention of Human Rights*: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, con-
science and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in
community with others and, in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and
observance." (http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf).

[9] Mattei Dogan, "Religious Beliefs in Europe: Factors of Accelerated Decline", Ralph L. Piedmont, David O. Moberg,
Research in the Social Scientific Study of Religion Volume 14, Leiden, Brill, 2003, p. 161-180.

1   noticeable. Of course, this affects mainly the part of Europe previously under the Communist

2   regime: in many of these countries, the presence of religion is now accepted, and the religious

3   groups have recovered. In other places, the relationship of the state to religion has changed

4   tremendously because of a recent major political upheaval. Elsewhere, the relationship of the

5   state to religion has developed at a slower pace. Several nations have experienced an important

6   change concerning the place that religion used to hold in the political landscape. In Sweden, the

7   (Lutheran) Church of Sweden used to be the state church, but has not been any more since

8   2000; in Italy, the Catholic Church no longer has a specific social status. Another change is the

9   fact that in many European countries, believers now do not represent the main part of the popu-

10   lation.[10]

11   Although the numbers may display meaningful differences, all the European countries exhibit a

12   significant drop in religious belonging as well as in practice. For a long time, scholars have ex-

13   plained that drop by the loss of the belief in the existence of God. Modern civilization was be-

14   coming more technological, and this modernity would necessarily come with a growing rationali-

15   ty, was the general understanding since the Enlightenment. This modern thought was consid-

16   ered incompatible with beliefs understood as proceeding from a less advanced way of thinking.

17   However, the multiplication of new religions in the 1970s (the "New Age") led observers to admit

18   that it was more a reconfiguration of beliefs than a drop (some even claim an increase in reli-

19   gious beliefs among youth). Generally speaking, however, one must admit that the major

20   change concerns the intertwined dynamics of the relation between institutions and individuals.

21   To belong, or to remain, in a religious group, less and less depends on the social birth group of

22   the individuals. On the contrary, people are in search of meaning, move from one group to an-

23   other, cobble together their own ideas, and change. All this is best expressed as a development

24   in the relation to institutions. The caving-in of religious practice most probably demonstrates a

25   reorganisation of traditional affiliations more than the disappearance of beliefs. Most individuals

26   no longer rely mainly on church institutions to provide the frames for the way they think religion

27   and spirituality, but they tend to set the borders up for themselves. Religious belonging nowa-

28   days is more fluid; religious ideas are taken over and transformed, becoming hybrid ideas. Re-

29   cent European surveys reveal, for instance, that a majority of Europeans believe more easily in

30   a supernatural power than in a personal God.[11] The decline in prestige of important religious

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[10] For further information, see reports by *Religionsmonitor*, (http://www.religionsmonitor.de/english.html) or *Pew Forum* (http://www.pewforum.org/).

[11] Detlef Pollack, Olaf Müller, Gert Pickel (ed.), The Social Significance of Religion in the Enlarged Europe. Secularization, Individualization and Pluralization. London, Ashgate, 2012.

1   traditions also discloses new forms of reference to religions: spirituality becomes an individual

2   matter. People feel free in their relation to religion, and thus create new structures of faith, such

3   as those claiming to be "Buddhist Jews".[12] All in all, it is a risky task to try and provide a general

4   explanation for this development. The changes in the religious landscape can be described quite

5   easily; they are more difficult to explain. The religious change in Europe may be expressing

6   secularisation,[13] or pluralisation, or the return of religion, or the transformation of religion, or

7   even a combination of these ideas.

8   Whatever the interpretation, however, one idea can definitely be turned down for good: religion

9   is not disappearing. At the same time as the relation of individuals to religious institutions moves

10   toward a diminution of the political importance of churches in some countries, the highly reli-

11   gious historical base of Europe is being acknowledged or rediscovered. In all the countries, pub-

12   lic institutions and their structure, social values, and even the cultural framework often have their

13   roots in religion: items as diverse as hospitals, chaplaincies, human rights, or the end-of-the-

14   week rest, originally had a religious dimension. Christian perspectives and practices have signif-

15   icantly influenced many cultures in Europe, and Jewish, Muslim, pre-Christian and Enlighten-

16   ment traditions also had an impact on Europe throughout history. Although their religious dimen-

17   sion is sometimes lost, such explicit value-orientations are deemed important by many people

18   and they refuse to part with it.

19   ## 2.3   European religious diversity

20   Christianity is far from being the only religion in Europe. Religious diversity has already been a

21   reality in Europe for centuries, with the presence of Jews in many European countries, and with

22   Islamic communities in several countries in Eastern and Central Europe and already legally rec-

23   ognised during the Habspurg Empire, for example. This is another common feature of European

24   history: the plurality of cultures and religions. Cultural differences, sometimes accentuated by

25   the process of globalisation, can be found within European societies. Moreover, mobility (due to

26   tourism and migration), as well as the quick and easy dissemination of information, brings indi-

27   viduals to encounter and learn about many cultural universes different from their own back-

28   ground. Although Europe as a whole has always been religiously diverse, most Europeans now

29   discover in their own countries new religious cultures, previously unknown.

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[12] This example of combination of religious beliefs is given as an illustration; see Lionel Obadia, *Shalom Buddha*, Berg International, 2015.

[13] Detlef Pollack, *Säkularisierung - ein moderner Mythos?* (Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland). Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck 2003.

1   The contemporary diversity has frequently been made more visible by the presence of migrants
2   from Muslim majority countries. Most Christians nowadays know about Muslims, but also about
3   many other religious groups, e.g. Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'i. Recently, the end of
4   the Communist regime has brought into Europe several countries in which there is a significant
5   Muslim presence (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bul-
6   garia). Altogether, the presence of Islam is increasingly noticeable in many European countries,
7   above all because Muslims have grown in the number since the second half of the twentieth
8   century. This numerical importance, and the change in mentalities, brings the religious minorities
9   to seek a greater visibility. Europe claims a strong commitment to freedom of religion and belief,
10 and contemporary societies affirm the "right to difference": the two elements put together lead
11 most minority groups to the demand of better public recognition. Although several religious
12 groups, such as some smaller Protestant churches, have also raised their voice, Islam is the
13 most well-known of these emerging groups. In many European countries, the Muslim presence
14 is a central issue of public debates, and this religion has strongly taken part in challenging the
15 habits concerning the visibility of religion in the more or less secularized European societies.
16 This can be due to the fact that Muslims represent one of the largest religious minority groups
17 (due both to migration dynamics and to a high level of intergenerational transmission). This de-
18 bate can also be exploited politically, for various reasons. However, one must also bear in mind
19 that the debate raised both by Muslims and about Islam from the non-Muslim majority some-
20 times has roots in ethnic tensions, and current political events. For instance, recent arguments
21 on circumcision, religious slaughter, or the wearing of religious symbols, have mostly focused on
22 Muslims although they also concern Jews or Sikhs.

23 This may be in relation to the fact that, notwithstanding certain exceptions, Christianity is in Eu-
24 rope generally confronted with a change in its importance, and a modified perception of the role
25 of churches in public life. It is also confronted with both a growing tendency to religious hybridi-
26 zation, and the increasing number of atheists or non-believers. While the number of church
27 members is often declining, other religious groups are in the meanwhile gaining importance.
28 These dynamics that Europe is experiencing have varied and sometimes opposing conse-
29 quences.[14] All religious groups now belong to a universe in which travel is easy and quick, and
30 the dissemination of information is nearly immediate. That changes the link between religion and
31 country of birth. Sikhs of Britain, Baptists of France, or Alevis of Germany, live connected to oth-
32 er members of their faith group, in their native country or elsewhere in the world. Religious be-

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[14]   See chapter 5 of this report.

1   longing is worldwide, and religious conflicts affecting a country echo all over the world (especial-

2   ly when they provoked the displacement of populations who bring along traumatized patterns of

3   interreligious relations). Global interconnection is strong; distance does not necessarily mean

4   breaking ties, and goods and news can circulate easily. Even so, these ties do slacken. Moves

5   modify religious customs: rites, practices, and languages change in a new national context, like

6   other social and cultural dimensions. The change of context also often means a change in the

7   collective pressure, and the link to religion is also modified. It can be intensified (religion be-

8   comes really a "chosen" affiliation) or weakened (it is one of the many things left behind). In any

9   case, immigrants have decisions to make: relationship to religious belonging and practice needs

10   to be determined. Should one try to adapt to the way the religion is practised in the receiving

11   country, or keep the ways of the country of birth? This dynamic is shared by all: the coexistence

12   of a number of religious groups may open their minds because convictions are put into perspec-

13   tive when the practice of several religions in the same country seems possible. At the same

14   time, they may just as well bring people to believe in exclusive religious truths.

2.4   Dealing with religious diversity

16   The coexistence of different social groups is a contemporary reality, which does not mean it is

17   easily dealt with everywhere. In many countries formerly under Communist regime, the newly

18   recovered religious freedom does not run totally smooth: for lack of a common ideological ene-

19   my, the different ethnic and religious communities tend to rise against each other; religious insti-

20   tutions sometimes compete to recover former privileges. These countries also exhibit a reaffir-

21   mation of the religious identity (Poland, Bulgaria for instance), which can go together with a

22   hardening of "ethnic" boundaries and a reinforcement of stereotypes (such as those against

23   Roma in Bulgaria), and an increasing of internal fractures. There, and in many countries of Eu-

24   rope, religious belonging and national belonging are understood as necessarily linked. Religious

25   diversity becomes then increasingly hard to admit, and emigration is a difficult experience. The

26   place of the religion in the country of origin or the receiving country is also a determining ele-

27   ment. If it is a majority or a minority, if it is known or unknown, respected or despised, all this

28   plays a role. But human migration compels all the religious denominations to reassess their own

29   understanding of themselves: nowadays, no denomination holds the majority. In nearly all the

30   countries of Europe, everybody is forced to learn this though to some it may come as a surprise.

31   This will bring Muslims from the Middle East to discover, upon arriving in Europe, non-Arabic-

32   speaking Muslims; it will bring European Muslims or Christians to discover African Muslims or

33   Christians; Iranian Muslims to discover that Shia Islam is, on a world scale, a minority; Romani-

34   ans to discover Greek or Russian Orthodoxy – and the list could be longer still. All religious

1   groups are now, one way or another, experiencing a situation of encounter with other faiths, if

2   only in diaspora. This situation can have different consequences: discovering other faiths can

3   lead some to a greater open-mindedness; to others, it may be a trigger to rally around their iden-

4   tity and move to a fundamentalist religious behaviour. It can happen that newcomers integrate

5   into relatively established groups, and that their habits and convictions cause some friction. Re-

6   ligious diversity is more and more frequently encountered inside the denominations themselves.

7   Or else, groups create new institutions in their host country; sometimes, the leading institution

8   from their homeland, who consider themselves responsible for orthodox thinking do not recog-

9   nize them, whereas the migrants in turn claim that they have the authentic belief, based on what

10   they reconstruct from the memories of their past. In fact, most usually, all possibilities are open:

11   from the development of fresh and diverse "spirituality" on the outskirts of the principal denomi-

12   nations, to the reinforcement of demanding religious practices, which can easily be seen as fun-

13   damentalist or extreme. Of course, this behaviour mostly concerns limited parts of the different

14   religions. However, since they are sometimes very active groups, they may create some dis-

15   turbance, all the more so because they question the relation to the political power (government)

16   and institutions, in the name of their religion. In some countries, these groups become the most

17   visible aspect of religion in the society, at the expense of other groups. They then unfortunately

18   contribute to giving religion a bad social image. Most people, however, do not go to such a radi-

19   cal level of commitment, and the increased religious diversity is for most an occasion for interre-

20   ligious contacts, frequently via interreligious marriage and religious education, leading to an in-

21   crease in the cooperation between religious groups.[15] However, one must note potential con-

22   flicts originating from anti-Liberal views on modern society (e.g. the concept of religious politics,

23   the concepts of family and gender relations, the freedom of art). One must also note the growing

24   importance of extremist and populist parties, or of nationalistic attitudes, in many European

25   countries.

26   Altogether, the changing landscape of religions in Europe is leading to challenges for the

27   Protestant churches, which need to give account of their values and convictions to very diverse

28   interlocutors. Protestant churches want sufficient attention to be paid to human rights, and they

29   want their values of respect to individuals to be taken into account and implemented in the politi-

30   cal sphere. They acknowledge the necessity of developing the dialogue with Muslims; this ques-

31   tion, however, cannot be dealt with as such in this report and would necessitate another process

32   dedicated to it. Finally, in face of the criticisms and questions that all churches encounter nowa-

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[15]   See chapter 5 of this report.

days, the Protestants churches need to be able to express themselves on the basis of shared convictions. Of course, while each one of them wants to avoid being assimilated to an expression that they would not find totally acceptable, religious solidarity with the other Protestant churches remains a very important dimension. The discourse of the churches on religious diversity concerns non-members. Therefore, it has consequences for the image of the churches. At the same time, the topic of religious diversity is a necessary internal matter for thought.

3. Overview of church documents[16]

3.1 Ecumenical guidelines

Whereas the Roman Catholic Church, back in 1965, promulgated the declaration on the relation with non-Christian religions "*Nostra Aetate*", the Protestant churches needed more time to produce basic documents on the principles of their relation with other religions. The World Council of Churches (WCC) published its first *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* in 1979 (adopted by the Assembly in 1983). The guidelines judge interreligious dialogue a fundamental part of Christian service within the community, and a fulfilment of the commandment to love one's neighbour (*WCC, Guidelines*, no. 18). They invite Christians to let themselves be questioned by other religions (no. 22), and encourage them to engage in dialogue though they underline the risk of syncretism (no. 24-28). Thus, the guidelines advise on how to conduct dialogues, but do not say much about the underlying theological principles of the Christian churches. The WCC document was taken up on regional levels, e.g. by the British Council of Churches in its *Relations with people of other faiths: guidelines on dialogue in Britain* (1981). The *Baar Statement*, published by a consultation in 1990, went a step further in stating that "plurality of religious traditions" is "both the result of the manifold ways in which God has related to peoples and nations as well as a manifestation of the richness and diversity of humankind" (WCC, *Theological Perspectives on Plurality*, no. II). Referring to John 10:16, it argues that God's salvation in Christ extends beyond the boundaries of the Christian community (no. III). It refers to Gal 5:22-23 in affirming "that God the Holy Spirit has been at work in the life and traditions of peoples of living faiths" (no. IV).

The 2004 revision of the 1979 *Guidelines* takes a more cautious approach when it acknowledges that religious plurality may give rise to communal tensions (*WCC, Ecumenical considerations*, no. 6), and argues for being "aware of the ambiguities of religious expressions" (no. 11) and

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[16] A complete list of the documents (most of them submitted to the CPCE office by the member churches) can be found in the Appendix.

1 adhering to the faith in the Triune God (no. 12). The first approach to a "Theology of religions"
2 can be found in a paper from 2006 (*WCC*, *Religious plurality*; presented at the Assembly in Por-
3 to Alegre) that takes the concept of "hospitality of a gracious God" as a starting point and con-
4 cludes that the "plurality of religious traditions [is] both the result of the manifold ways in which
5 God has related to peoples and nations as well as a manifestation of the richness and diversity
6 of human response to God's gracious gifts" (no. 42, taking up the Baar statement).

7 It seems that the concept of *missio Dei* (God's action direct to the whole humankind, with the
8 church as an instrument within this action) provided the horizon for understanding the existence
9 of other religions, and thus forms the background for the WCC documents. Such a broad under-
10 standing of mission has specifically been rejected by the Lausanne Movement, which identifies
11 mission and evangelism. It stated in its *Manila Manifesto* 1992: "We affirm that other religions
12 and ideologies are not alternative paths to God, and that human spirituality, if unredeemed by
13 Christ, leads not to God but to judgment, for Christ is the only way" (no. 7). The *Cape Town*
14 *Commitment* (2010) affirmed the plea for "robust apologetics" instead of "postmodern, relativist
15 pluralism" (II.A.2).

16 The focus on evangelism, which is most important for the Evangelical movement, has for some
17 time been less important for the European Protestant mainline churches, but since the 1990s,
18 consciousness of the necessity of evangelism has also grown among them[17], and thus a few
19 documents explicitly consider the relation between interreligious dialogue and mis-
20 sion/evangelism.

21 This connection is also the focus of the widest agreement on this subject achieved within Chris-
22 tianity up to now. In 2011 the WCC and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) agreed, together
23 with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, on "Recommendations for Conduct" in the
24 Christian relation to people of other faiths (in the document *Christian Witness in a multireligious*
25 *world*). The document does not intend to definitively clarify the relations between interreligious
26 dialogue and mission. However, it urges the commission to evangelize and calls for rejecting all
27 forms of violence, for respecting "full personal freedom", and for appreciating "what is true and
28 good" in other beliefs (no. 6, 7 and 10).

29 Documents issued by Protestant churches or church bodies in the last decades stand within this
30 range of positions. It should be observed that the majority of documents did not come into being
31 before the 21st century, i.e. they were composed after the attacks of 9/11 which changed the

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[17] Cf. e.g. the CPCE document Evangelizing. Protestant Perspectives for the Churches in Europe (2006).

view of Islam in the West, and put the contribution of religions for a peaceful cohabitation high on the agenda. Together with the increased visibility of Islam in many European countries, this may also explain why many Protestant churches in Europe published documents on the relationship to Islam rather than to other religions in general. Although the focus of this study is meant to be religious plurality in general, and not the relationship to certain religions, these documents should at least be considered regarding their view of religious plurality. In a first survey, however, we will only present documents concerned with interreligious dialogue at large.

3.2   Basic documents of Protestant churches

3.2.1. Documents on Christian faith and other religions

As already observed, Protestant churches, especially in Europe, needed longer than the Roman Catholic Church to produce basic documents on the relation to other religions. The explanation is analyzed in one of the first documents of this kind, the study *Religionen, Religiosität und christlicher Glaube* (1991) by the Protestant churches in Germany (written by a joint committee of the Lutheran churches and the Reformed and United churches). The document reflects on the heritage of Barthian theology with its dichotomy between Christian faith and "religion", and states that only the "return of religion" in the late 20th century paved the way for a self-perception of Christianity as taking its place within the religions. Thus, the concept of "Konvivenz" […] is used in the document, supporting the plea for positive theological encounters with other religions. The religions can even be seen as products of the creative power of God, by which God acts through human beings (p. 127). The Christian reluctance to accept sacralization is also underlined.

The study of the EKD *Christlicher Glaube und nichtchristliche Religionen* (2003, written by the Advisory Commission for Theology (*Kammer für Theologie*) and approved by the Council), remarkably, does not mention the study of 1991. It notes an opposition between Christianity, based on the "experience of God's salvific love ("*Zuwendung*") towards humankind in the history of Jesus Christ" (p. 8), and the other religions, based on human experiences (cf. p. 5). The unique revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and the necessary distinction between law and Gospel, serve as arguments for a warning against participation in the religious practice of other religions, and against interreligious prayer (pp. 19-20). The document expresses that the secular state and the idea of human rights should be accepted by all religious communities.

In 2015 the Council of the EKD published a new statement (a "basic text") on the relation of Christian faith to religious diversity: *Christlicher Glaube und religiöse Vielfalt in evangelischer Perspektive*. Affirming religious diversity, the study emphasizes a secular legal order which se-

1 cures both the freedom of individual persons and of religious groups. This model of constitution-
2 al law on religion, which is based on freedom and participation and which Protestant theology
3 and the EKD have been strongly supporting in the last decades, is recommended as a common
4 European framework. In respect of the various encounters of Christians with adherents of other
5 religions within German society, the EKD argues for cooperation and dialogue, which should be
6 conducted without giving up one's own Christian convictions, including responsibility for mission
7 and evangelization. Distancing itself from problematic modes of mission and evangelization, it
8 nevertheless highlights evangelization as an interest in other people and their lives, thus being
9 compatible with a positive estimation of other religions. In the thorough discussion of issues of a
10 theology of religion *("Religionstheologie")* the study refrains from favouring one model of relating
11 Christianity to other religions. However, it rejects approaches which presuppose that all religions
12 are referring to the same transcendent reality.

13 Besides the EKD some of its member churches ("*Landeskirchen"*) have published basic docu-
14 ments of their own which aim at different target groups and have different foci. The documents
15 from the churches in Hesse-Nassau and Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia, in particu-
16 lar, do not show much interest in measuring other religions against Christian convictions, and
17 thus pointing out the differences, but prefer to seek aspects that promote an open encounter.
18 The two strongly connected documents from the <u>Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-</u>
19 <u>Silesian Upper Lusatia</u> (*Diskussionsbeitrag* and *Grundlagen*, 2012/13) refer to the unlimited love
20 of God, to which Christians shall witness in the world, and to the Holy Spirit, in which God is
21 active in manifold ways in the world so that Christians can perceive his activity in other religions
22 as well. There is a strong plea for an open dialogue, which even includes participation in the
23 religious practice and spirituality of the other religions. Likewise, the document of the <u>Protestant</u>
24 <u>Church in Hesse and Nassau</u> (*Life in Diversity*, 2003) states "that Christian faith today must
25 learn how to express its knowledge and its experiences of faith in the presence of other convic-
26 tions", and this in an attitude of "fundamental respect for different ways of believing" (no. 4.1). It
27 should not weaken the commission to give witness which has been highlighted before (with the
28 concept of *missio Dei*), but witness shall be given in an attitude of respect, without devaluating
29 the religious convictions of others (no. 4.2). In the concluding chapter, this text tries to identify
30 resources for a more positive discernment of other religions. It refers to the biblical insight that
31 God's Spirit blows where it chooses (no. 5.1), to the necessity of an inviting attitude for fulfilling
32 the Great Commandment, and to the concept of truth as a process.

33 A similar approach characterizes the document of the <u>Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches</u>
34 *Wahrheit in Offenheit* (2007). After taking account of several other official positions, character-
35 ized by distinctions and demarcations, it suggests "getting involved in the debate with other reli-

1 gions and carving out the specifically Christian by the way of a dialogical dispute with their cer-
2 tainties of truth" (no. 1.5). A detailed consideration of the nature of truth in relation to faith
3 (ch.2.1) backs this position. Even the Bible verses that are often quoted in favour of an exclusiv-
4 ist position, correctly understood, do not justify an absolutist understanding. The faith in the Tri-
5 une God, in God as the creator of the whole creation, in Jesus Christ as the representation of
6 God's salvific presence in history, and in God's Spirit drifting at will and permeating the whole
7 creation (2.4), give support to the acknowledgement that "God also represented Godself outside
8 of the Gospel, in creative energy, salvific action and in the power of God's Spirit, in order to fulfil
9 the divine universal will for salvation" (2.4.3, p. 47 in German text).

10 *Faith Meeting Faith* (2001), a booklet published by the <u>Methodist Church in Britain</u>, provides
11 study material in order to enable congregation members to encounters with people of other
12 faiths. It was complemented by the booklet *May I call you friend? Sharing our faith in with people*
13 *of other faiths* (2006).

14 An openness towards other religions also characterizes the main contribution in the book *Sann*
15 *mot sig själv – öppen till andra* (True to oneself – open towards others), which serves as the
16 most important reference texts in the (Lutheran) <u>Church of Sweden</u>. The author Kajsa Ahlstrand
17 argues that encounter with other religions has to be both true to one's own faith and open to
18 new (even spiritual) experiences. Special focus is given to questions of how to conduct dia-
19 logues (e.g. with sensitivity towards power relations and to the distinction between liturgical and
20 theological language) and to what Christians can learn from encounters with specific religions.
21 Although the necessity of a theology of religions is underlined, there is no detailed sketch of
22 such a theology.

23 The policy documents of the (Lutheran) <u>Church of Norway</u> reveal a similar interest in the ques-
24 tion of how to conduct dialogues. *Guidance for religion encounter* (adopted by the General Syn-
25 od 2006) describes the attitude in which Christians are expected to start dialogues with "open-
26 ness, the will to see and listen, honesty, frankness and the absence of force and abuse of pow-
27 er". After a number of recommendations substantiating these attitudes, some "concrete chal-
28 lenges in religion encounter" are also briefly addressed. The *Guiding principles for interreligious*
29 *relations* (2008), an internal paper, giving account of the aims and basic assumptions of the
30 Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, has a similar focus. Both documents start
31 from the faith in the triune God as the basis for dialogue, without interpreting it in a one-sided
32 exclusivist or pluralist way (*Guiding Principles*, 1.1: "We know of no other way to salvation than

Jesus Christ, but nor can we place restrictions on God's saving acts"[18]). Additional material is provided in the books *When Believers Meet. A Study Guide on Interreligious Dialogue* (2007) and *Kirke nå* (*Church Now*). The first book looks into three issues of practical interest: mixed marriage, prayer and religious symbols. The last chapter ("A matter of relationships") puts relationality as the key category at the centre. This is also the focus of the second book's chapter on the Lutheran Church in relation to other religions. In 2013 a resource book for youth in the church to address anti-semitism, islamophobia and anti-ziganism was published: …*Sier vi.* (…*We say*) The book from 2016 *Dialogteologi på norsk* (*Dialogue theology in Norwegian*) with several contributors from academia and the Church of Norway is an example of recent theological reflections on inter-religious encounters from a Norwegian context, aiming to provide protestant theological resources for the calling of the Church in a pluralist society. The bishop's conference published in 2016 a guidance for interreligious encounter connected to church rituals: *Religionsmøtet ved kirkelige handlinger.*

Smaller churches often are not in capacity to produce documents centred on interreligious dialogue, but present their position in documents of a more general character. The document *The Czechoslovak Hussite Church in Relation to Ecumenism* from 2014, for example, contains a chapter on interfaith dialogue. It motivates this dialogue by the challenges of nowadays pluralistic societies, and regards other religions as responses to God's love, which speaks to all people through the Holy Spirit. They are "expression of human encounters with God, and of real efforts to find and to praise God properly, although this effort has not resulted in the recognition and acceptance of Jesus Christ" (no. III.5.1). Therefore, a dialogue is promoted "whose aims are mutual understanding and enrichment, overcoming prejudices, and peaceful co-existence" (no. III.9.3).

In the same way, the Waldensian and Methodist Churches in Italy dealt with ecumenism and interreligious dialogue together in the document *L'Ecumenismo e il dialogo interreligioso* of 1998, approved by their Synod. Highlighting the necessity of overcoming a history of violent relationship with other religions, it calls for interreligious dialogue maintaining the importance of christology.

The Christian Reformed Church in the Slovak Republic sent a short text in German (*Stellungnahme*) which was apparently formulated in response to the request from the CPCE office to send official documents. The text supports dialogue between different religions in order to come to shared positions regarding challenges in the social sphere, but strongly opposes a dialogue

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[18]   This is a quotation from the consensus of the 1989 World Mission Conference of San Antonio.

1   that would lead to a loss of identity for the participating church (regarding their convictions and

2   dogmas) or to the merging of religions.

3   Some churches do not provide documents on their position towards other religions, but express

4   this position in general documents about the principle of the church. As an example, the United

5   Protestant Church of France, in its advertising pamphlet *Choisir la confiance* (2013), presents

6   itself as an open church holding ecumenical and interreligious dialogues (p. 6) and motivates

7   this with the statement that "churches need the other churches in order to deepen their convic-

8   tions and to implement them in front of the challenges of our time" (p. 9, French text).

9   **3.2.2. Documents on dialogue and mission**

10 A few documents seem less interested in interreligious dialogue as such or in the theology of

11 religions than in the relationship between mission and dialogue. The first of these documents is

12 *Called to Be Neighbors and Witnesses: Guidelines for Interreligious Relationships*. At the time of

13 its first adoption by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church in 1980, it was one

14 of the first documents on this topic published by a (now) CPCE church. The document in its pre-

15 sent revised form was adopted in 2008. As the title indicates, neighbourly love and witnessing

16 are the two key terms in this document; both have to come together in dialogue, which "offers to

17 both partners the opportunity of enriching their own faith through the wisdom of the other". A

18 Christological focus guides the document, and the basic tone is a call to respectful and honest

19 encounter.

20 In a similar way, the document *Mission and evangelism in a multifaith society*, adopted by the

21 Church of Scotland in 1993, promotes dialogue as a fulfilment of the commandment to love and

22 as a commission for each congregation. The appendix contains useful interpretations of Bible

23 passages relevant to the topic (pp. 573-577).

24 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark released the document *Mission and dialogue* in

25 2006, stating that both attitudes are elementary for the churches and have to be combined.

26 The most detailed document on the subject, drawn up by the theological commission of the

27 Evangelical Church of Westphalia in 2004, has the title *Mission – Missionsverständnis – Dialog*

28 *mit anderen Religionen*. Starting with a general description of the religious situation of Protestant

29 churches in Germany and a survey on mission from the perspective of the New Testament, it

30 states that mission and evangelism are essential for a Protestant church. Dialogue with other

31 religions is also necessary, however, and mission (in respect to people of other faith) can only

32 have the form of dialogue. The final chapter shows that this is in line with the concept of "*missio*

33 *Dei*".

3.2.3. Documents on specific subjects

Some churches provide documents on specific subjects that either have a practical focus or deal with the relationship of state and society towards religious communities. Quite practical is e.g. the short text *Der Fremde in unserer Mitte,* published by the <u>European Methodist Council</u> in 1999 and recommending the Methodist congregations to develop a culture of hospitality, also towards persons of different faith. Similarly, the concept of hospitality is central in the <u>EKD</u> text *„... denn ihr seid selbst Fremde gewesen" – Vielfalt anerkennen und gestalten* from 2009, giving an account of the church's position towards immigration politics.

One of the documents concerned with the question of the role of religions in the public sphere and their relation towards state and civil society was *Carta di Milano* (2013), sent by the <u>Waldensian Church</u>. It was produced by different religious communities in Milan as a preparatory text to a forum of interreligious relations and encloses a few suggestions on the practice of dialogue and encounter, without making this a subject of its own.

A special problem concerning the relationship between Christianity and other religions in the public sphere is religious education in public schools. In Germany, where the right to confessional religious education is guaranteed by the constitution, the EKD and several Protestant churches reflect on this subject. The <u>EKD</u> published *Religiöse Orientierung gewinnen. Evangelischer Religionsunterricht als Beitrag zu einer pluralitätsfähigen Schule* in 2014, providing even theoretical material regarding the need for a pluralist approach towards religious education. In the <u>North Elbian Lutheran Church</u> the committee on interreligious dialogue in 2009 published a discussion paper *Interreligiöses Lernen in Schulen in Schleswig-Holstein.* It highlights the importance of interreligious learning in a multi-religious society and recommends cooperation with other churches and religious communities, both for developing the Protestant religious education and for supporting those religions which cannot at present offer religious education in state schools. The importance of interreligious competence in further education of pastors is highlighted, as well.

The booklet *Religionsfreiheit* (2012) of the <u>Evangelical Church in the Rhineland</u> makes clear that the question of religious freedom also concerns the relationship towards other religions. It recommends that Christian parishes should support the building of mosques as a consequence of their approval of religious freedom, that needs to be actively and constructively shaped. Besides, it advocates a general dialogical attitude, originating from the belief that all human beings are made in the image of God, and from the commandment of neighbourly love.

Most of the practical questions addressed in the booklet originate from the presence of Muslims in European countries, and therefore the <u>Conference of Churches on the Rhine</u> (a regional

group of CPCE churches) in 2009 published the statement *Freedom of religion as a human right in Christianity and Islam*. The declaration states that – against the background of increasing cultural and religious diversity in Europe – freedom of religion is of central importance as a basis for the churches. This also includes a guarantee from the state of the right to change one's religion or ideological convictions. Therefore, the understanding of human rights and their foundation should be a major topic in the dialogue between Christianity and Islam.

Another special subject concerns the question of joint celebrations and especially common prayers. It was e.g. considered by the British Council of Churches in the paperback *Can we pray together? Guidelines for worship in a multi-faith society* from 1983. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria did likewise in its aid to multireligious prayer, *Multireligiöses Beten* (1992; ⁴1999). This distinguishes between interreligious prayer which is seen as problematic, and multireligious prayer which can be supported if each side maintains its integrity (e.g. if Christians continue to pray to the Triune God). The booklet is most concerned with relations with Islam; a few other documents on common prayer explicitly limit themselves to this question and will be considered in 3.2.4.

The guide entitled *Ratgeber zu interreligiösen Veranstaltungen*, published in 2006 by the Central/ Southern Europe of the United Methodist Church, sounds a bit more reluctant regarding the participation in interreligious ceremonies. It states that they cannot be an end in themselves, but can only exist as a service to civil society in special occasions. Interreligious services are not possible, interreligious dialogue needs a clear mandate and has to be distinguished from joint actions on a local level.

3.2.4. Documents on the relationship with Islam

Regarding the churches' relationship with Islam, different types of documents have to be distinguished. On the one hand, there are publications aiming at informing members of Protestant churches about Islam. One of the first examples is the book *Was jeder vom Islam wissen muss*, published by the EKD and the VELKD for the first time in 1990 (based on a series of leaflets from 1981) and since then distributed in several editions (the latest being the completely revised 8th edition in 2011). After two chapters with elementary information about Muslim faith and religious life and about the history of different groups in Islam, including their relation to modernity, a third chapter deals with the relations between Christianity and Islam. The image of Abraham and Jesus in the Qur'an is considered, together with contacts in history and aspects concerning the cohabitation of Christians and Muslims. In the first editions, a fourth chapter contained a Christian appreciation of Muslim faith, discussing, among other things, whether Islam can be seen as a way towards salvation.

1   Basic information on Islam is also provided by a series of six articles *Den Islam verstehen*, pub-

2   lished by the <u>United Methodist Church (Central and Southern Europe)</u> between 1998 and 2000.

3   The series deals with different aspects of Muslim faith like the Qur'an, notions of revelation and

4   salvation, but also the understanding of the state. Some of the articles have Muslim authors,

5   others present Islam to Christian readers (in a little more academic way than the German book),

6   but try to give a fair account and to engage with the self-understanding of Islam. Regarding the

7   notion of revelation, the article appreciates both the connections and the distinctions between

8   Christian and Muslim understandings of it. The official position of the UMC can be found in the

9   resolution *Our Muslim Neighbors* (adopted 1992 and reformulated and readopted by the general

10   conference 2004) that encourages Christian-Muslim dialogue in order to promote peace and

11   reconciliation. Similar perspectives can be found in the document *Wesleyan/Methodist Witness*

12   *in Christian and Islamic cultures*, published in 2004 by the <u>World Methodist Council</u>.

13   A book similar to *Was jeder vom Islam wissen muss* is *Evangelische Christen und Muslime in*

14   *Österreich*, published by the <u>Protestant</u> <u>Church in Austria</u> in 2011 (after an adoption by the gen-

15   eral synod). After some basic information about the self-understanding and the history of Islam

16   and its presence in Austria, aspects concerning the cohabitation of Christians and Muslims (like

17   the understanding of politics and law, religious freedom, gender questions and mission) are dis-

18   cussed in a detailed way. The book ends with recommendations for Christian-Muslim encoun-

19   ters and a presentation of questions central for the Christian-Muslim dialogue (with accounts of

20   the Christian understanding). It is obvious that the book tries to correct popular Christian misun-

21   derstandings and prejudices against Islam; it also points out some basic differences. Thus it

22   rejects the invocation of Abraham as the progenitor of the monotheistic religions, since "in Mus-

23   lim view the God's way with humankind did not begin with the election of Abraham, but with the

24   creation of humankind" (ch. 5, p. 101, German text). It is also stated that there is a difference in

25   the understanding of God, since "only the revelation in Jesus Christ makes it possible to encom-

26   pass God in His loving and reconciling nature."

27   Most of the other documents originate from German churches once more. The <u>EKD</u> comple-

28   mented its book with the practical aid to encounters with Muslims *Zusammenleben mit Mus-*

29   *limen in Deutschland. Gestaltung der christlichen Begegnung mit Muslimen* (2000). Published

30   by the EKD Council, this slimmer volume has a more official character than the book mentioned

31   above. One of its foci is the recommending fruitful encounters with Muslims on the basis of mu-

32   tual respect. The last chapter therefore contains considerations of Muslim children in Protestant

33   nurseries, on encounter at schools, and on Christian-Muslim marriages. Basic information also

34   seemed necessary, in order to handle "clichés and negative images" and to overcome a "sound

35   of mistrust and allegation" (Introduction). On the other hand, it aims to deal with contradictory

1 positions within the EKD regarding the question whether Christians and Muslims pray to the

2 same God for instance, or whether there is an irreconcilability between Christianity and Islam.

3 Therefore chapter II provides a theological orientation and discusses the relations with Islam in

4 the context of relations with other religions. Discussing the different notions of God and ques-

5 tions of epistemology, it recommends "*Konvivenz*" and mutual witness in authenticity.

6 Six years later, the EKD published another document on the same subject: *Klarheit und gute*

7 *Nachbarschaft. Christen und Muslime in Deutschland* (2006). Its preface refers to new develop-

8 ments in German society, but also to a changed image of Islam in the West after 9/11. Its focus

9 lies therefore on the political thought of Islam, on Muslim organizations, and on the role of Islam

10 in society. The introducing theological chapter is quite short and does not raise new aspects

11 compared to the document of 2000; nor does the final chapter on the goals and subjects of the

12 interreligious dialogue. Nevertheless, the document met with harsh criticism (even from repre-

13 sentatives of EKD churches) for its strategy of demarcation. In 2015, *Guidelines for encouraging*

14 *dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Germany* could be published together with the Co-

15 ordination Council of Muslims in Germany, giving both general perspectives and practical rec-

16 ommendations for a dialogue at eye level. The document *Reformation and Islam* (2016), occa-

17 sioned by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, gives an account of the Reformers' attitude

18 towards Muslims and Islam and draws consequences for a new dialogical relationship with Is-

19 lam.

20 *Integrity and Respect. Islam Memorandum* is the title of a statement issued by the Protestant

21 Church in the Netherlands in 2011. It describes the relationship between Christianity and Islam

22 as mainly antagonistic, historically as well as theologically. In a rough sketch, it contrasts Chris-

23 tian and Muslim teachings. On the relational level, it calls for respect for Muslims, which is

24 spelled out in four kinds of activities: 1) love and assistance, 2) witness, 3) prayer, 4) coopera-

25 tion on a social level.

26 Some EKD churches, indeed, before and after the 2006 statement, went further in constructively

27 relating to Islam and recommending an open dialogue. Even if we take into account that the

28 documents of the Protestant regional churches ("Landeskirchen") again aim at the parishes and

29 want to provide material for encounters on the local level, a more dialogical tone can be ob-

30 served. One of the oldest of these documents, *Erste Schritte wagen. Eine Handreichung für die*

31 *Begegnung von Kirchengemeinden mit ihren muslimischen Nachbarn* (first edition 2000, 3rd

32 edition 2009), published by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, advocates a dialogue

33 based "not on a feeling of superiority or arrogance, but full of respect for difference and religious

34 earnestness" (p. 7, German text). The main content of the booklet is thus information about Is-

1 lam and about examples of encounter projects in Bavaria. The more practically oriented bro-

2 chures *Erste Schritte konkret. Gelungene Beispiele aus dem Arbeitsfeld des christlich-*

3 *islamischen Dialogs …* and *Begegnungen von Kirchengemeinden mit Muslimen, islamischen*

4 *Gruppierungen und Moscheevereinen* (both 2005) supplement this material. The latter also in-

5 cludes theological reflections, relating to the obligation of Christians to be open-minded in rela-

6 tion to other religions. The latest publication from this church, *Ein überzeugtes "Ja". Praxishilfen*

7 *für christlich-muslimische Trauungen* (2012), gives practical advice regarding pastoral and litur-

8 gical aspects of Christian-Muslim marriages, as similarly the document *Couples protestants-*

9 *musulmans*, released by a commission of the Féderation Protestant de France in 2015.

10 In a similar way, the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck in its brochure *Ermutigung und*

11 *Befähigung zur Begegnung von Christen und Muslimen* (2005) tried to enable the parish coun-

12 cils to lead fruitful encounters with Muslim individuals and groups. Therefore, it informs about

13 Islam (in general and in Germany) and summarizes the well-known Christian positions regarding

14 dialogue with other religions. The focus lies on fields of contact between Christians and Mus-

15 lims, including mixed marriages and multireligious prayer (which is recommended, in contrast to

16 interreligious prayer). In 2014, it was supplemented by the brochure *Seelsorge und kirchliche*

17 *Begleitung christlich-muslimischer Paare*, giving basic information about the legal questions as

18 well as the different understandings of marriage among Muslims and Protestants, and contain-

19 ing prayers and other texts for wedding celebrations.

20 Encouraged by the *Charta Oecumenica* no. 11, several churches underlined their commitment

21 to dialogue with Islam. The synod of the North Elbian Lutheran Church (in 2012 merged into the

22 Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany) in 2006 adopted the declaration *In guter*

23 *Nachbarschaft*. It requests the congregations "to make contact with the mosque communities in

24 their neighbourhood, or if this is already the case, to intensify the existing relations" and thus "to

25 promote the living together of people of different cultures and religions in social justice and un-

26 der the protection of the valid rule of law" (pp. 90-91, German text). The synod documentation[19]

27 contains the papers given at synod and at a preparatory study day that motivate the dialogical

28 attitude.

29 A fruit of the commitment to promote dialogue was the brochure *Gute Nachbarschaft leben. In-*

30 *formationen und Beispiele zur Förderung des christlich-islamischen Dialogs in der Nordkirche*, in

31 2013 published by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany. Like the documents

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[19] Hans-Christoph Goßmann (ed.), *In guter Nachbarschaft*. Dokumentation der Synode der Nordelbischen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche zum Thema „Christlich-islamischer Dialog" im Februar 2006, Reformatorischer Verlag, Hamburg 2006.

1　from Hesse Electorate and Bavaria, it provides basic information about Islam and argues in fa-
2　vour of dialogue. The chapter on theology is quite short, and highlights the positive valuation of
3　Jesus in the Qur'an.

4　Even before the North Elbian Lutheran Church, the synod of the <u>Evangelical Church in Baden</u>
5　had released its commitment towards dialogue and cooperation in the short document *Einander*
6　*mit Wertschätzung begegnen. Zum Zusammenleben von Christen und Muslimen in Baden* in
7　2005. This example was followed by a very similar text, *Miteinander leben lernen. Evangelische*
8　*Christen und Muslime in Württemberg* by the <u>Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg</u>
9　(2006). The <u>Evangelical Church in Baden</u> in 2014 published the book *Von Nachbarschaft zu*
10　*Partnerschaft*, providing analyses of several fields of encounter together with practical examples
11　and a study on tolerance as the starting basis of interreligious dialogue.

12　A few documents are not concerned with the relationship towards Islam in general, but with spe-
13　cific aspects of this relation. Already in 1997, the <u>Evangelical Church in the Rhineland</u> published
14　a document on joint prayer: *Christen und Muslime nebeneinander vor dem einen Gott. Zur*
15　*Frage gemeinsamen Betens*. It argues that Muslims and Christians do not pray to different
16　Gods, since there is only one God, also for Christians, whose acting can be seen in all religions.
17　But since the different forms and understandings of prayer cannot be unified, only joint *du'a* (in-
18　dividual prayer) is possible, not joint *salat* (ritual prayer).

19　After a document clarifying the relation between mission and dialogue in regard to Islam and
20　arguing for a dialogue that goes along with witness (*Mission und Dialog in der Begegnung mit*
21　*Muslimen*, 2002), the document *Abraham und der Glaube an den einen Gott* takes up the sub-
22　ject of the prayer to the one God, prompted by criticism of the document from 1997, among oth-
23　ers by the EKD. In a detailed argumentation, it discusses the nature of Christian Trinitarian the-
24　ology, highlighting the parallels between Christianity and Islam. The significance of Abraham as
25　a bond between the two religions is also defended against criticism. The latest document of this
26　church *Weggemeinschaft und Zeugnis im Dialog mit Muslimen* (2015) combines the theological
27　reflections on the relation of dialogue and mission with encouraging the parishes to intensify
28　cooperation and encounter and to realize a "*Weggemeinschaft*" (sharing part in their journeys)
29　with Muslims.

30　Besides the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria and the Evangelical Church of Hesse Elec-
31　torate-Waldeck (see above), two <u>Swiss cantonal churches</u> (Bern and Vaud) have also published
32　material regarding Christian-Muslim marriages. Both documents include preliminary reflections
33　about different aspects of these marriages, although they concentrate on liturgical material.

1   The *Rapport fra lytterunde blandt muslimske rganisationer og moskeer*, published by the <u>Evan-</u>
2   <u>gelical Lutheran Church in Denmark</u> in 2006, gives account of conversations with Muslim
3   mosques and organizations and serves for self-reflection mainly. In its response from 2008, the
4   <u>Danish Council of Churches</u> appreciated the openness and the interest in commonalities that
5   was expressed in the open letter of 138 Muslims, "A common Word", and promised to seek con-
6   tact with the Muslim communities in Denmark.

7   The document *Quel accueil pour les couples protestants–musulmans dans nos Églises* pub-
8   lished by the <u>Fédération protestante de France</u> (including not only the French CPCE churches)
9   is aimed at pastors and wants them to encourage church members planning a marriage with a
10   Muslim, and also to provide useful information for preparatory conversations with the couples
11   and liturgical material.

12   The most detailed text of this kind is the booklet *Lobet und preiset ihr Völker! Religiöse Feiern*
13   *mit Menschen muslimischen Glaubens*, published by the <u>Protestant Church in Hesse and Nas-</u>
14   <u>sau</u> in 2011. Besides marriage ceremonies, Christian-Muslim cooperation in other services is
15   also considered. Two articles specifically reflect on the question whether Muslims and Christians
16   pray to the same God (arguing in a similar way as the documents from the Rhineland). An addi-
17   tion is given in the brochure *Wenn Christen und Muslime in der Schule beten* (2014) about
18   Christian-Muslim prayers and celebrations in schools.

19   All these documents provide an overview of the ongoing discussions in the European Protestant
20   churches on the matter of religious diversity and interreligious relations. It demonstrates the im-
21   portance of the topic for the churches and at the same time displays the diversity of the priorities
22   and perspectives.

4. The Bible and Protestant theology in the face of religious plurality

24   In the face of religious plurality many churches and Christians ask how Protestant theology can
25   contribute to a constructive understanding of the diversity given by the plurality of religions.
26   Which arguments, approaches, and resources of Protestant theology emphasise a respectful
27   encounter of people of other faith? The following theological reflections are rooted in the Gospel,
28   i.e. in the revelation of God's radical grace in Jesus Christ, which is expressed in the doctrine of
29   justification by grace and faith.

30   The first part (4.1.) presents this reflection from a systematic perspective, following a Trinitarian
31   scheme. The second part (4.2.) discusses the meaning of "truth" in the understanding of Chris-
32   tian faith since constructive accounts of religious diversity are sometimes accused of relativizing
33   the truth-claims of Christian faith. The third part (4.3.) gives a biblical foundation for an open

1 encountering with the adherents of other religions. "Radical grace" is understood as an act of

2 God which creates freedom and confidence to move towards the religious other and interact

3 with him or her.

4 For the churches of the CPCE, "the unique mediation of Jesus Christ in salvation is the heart of

5 the Scriptures and the message of justification as the message of God's free grace is the meas-

6 ure of all the Church's preaching", and thus their common key to Scripture.[20]

7 Therefore the following reflections begin with spelling out the understanding of God's relation to

8 the world in terms of God's "radical grace" and then use it as a hermeneutical key for studying

9 the testimony of the Holy Scripture.

10 4.1 Radical grace

11 God's "righteousness is like the highest mountains" and God's "justice like the great deep"

12 (Psalm 36:6). The biblical terms "righteousness", "justice", "kindness", "mercy", "favour", which

13 unfold the meaning of "grace", indicate that God relates in a benevolent way to God's creatures.

14 Undeserved and unconditional is the core issue of Protestant faith, as of Christian faith in gen-

15 eral. Grace does not only mean the will of God to be benevolent, but the act of God which real-

16 izes that will to reconcile humankind. It does not only indicate an attribute of God, but expresses

17 the divine essence.

18 Biblical testimonies show that God on the one hand performs gracious acts in interaction with

19 humans, but on the other hand is not dependent on their behaviour. God acts freely. Grace is a

20 creative act, which has no precondition on the side of creation (Romans 11:6). Its only root (ra-

21 dix) is the gracious being of God. Therefore it is "radical". It has no other source than the being

22 and will of God which is unconditional love (John 4:7-12).

23 In the Reformation times the term "sola gratia" expressed this in order to stress the importance

24 of grace as opposed to the importance of works. Today the churches are called to define grace

25 beyond this opposition. Therefore this document tries to understand grace fully from its source.

26 God gives Godself fully in order to overcome the […] alienation of humans from God. The bro-

27 ken relationship between God and the creatures can only be healed by acts of unconditional

28 divine grace as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. Thus grace means the power of salvation, which

29 again and again re-establishes the relation to God, breaks open what Luther called 'the heart

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[20] Cf. Leuenberg Agreement 12; further reflections on hermeneutics can be found in the CPCE document *Scripture – Confession – Church* (Leuenberg documents 14). Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Leipzig 2013, especially pp. 63f.

1   bent in on itself', frees from the burden of sin and guilt and gives a new orientation in life. "It is
2   well for the heart to be strengthened by grace" (Hebrews 13:9).

3   From the insight that God's grace is radical – rooted in God alone – follows that it is universal
4   (Ps 33:5; 119:64). For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all (Titus 2:11). God
5   loved the entire world (John 3:16), and so wants all human beings to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4)
6   and not a single one to perish (2 Peter 3:9). „Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not
7   for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The commitment to the uni-
8   versality of God's radical grace urges to not confine God's salvific presence to the borders of the
9   Christian religion. This presence was at work before religion appeared in history, and it is at
10 work beyond the sphere of its influence. It trespasses not only ethnic, social, and cultural con-
11 fines, but also religious ones.

12 Theological reflections on the relation between Christian faith and non-Christian religions need
13 to be founded in the core of Christian faith: the faith in God's radical grace. In the doctrine of
14 Trinity (which cannot be fully unfolded here), it is confessed in a threefold way – as the creative,
15 salvific and inspiring activity of God. Each of those three modes of gracious activity is important
16 for understanding theologically the plurality of religions.

17 **4.1.1. The radical grace of God's creative activity.**

18 „God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16).
19 God is not a self-sufficient being, resting quiescently in Godself, but a relational centre of activi-
20 ty. God's very being leads God to call into being a reality different from God's own and accom-
21 panies it through history.

22 God's grace realized itself again in the election of God's people, and in the covenant established
23 with them. Divine election, however, does not mean that there is no grace of God outside the
24 chosen people. On the contrary, Israel discovered that God also bestows benevolence on other
25 peoples. The God who led Israel out of Egypt also guided other nations (Amos 9:7). According
26 to Isaiah 19:24-25, the Lord Almighty says, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work
27 of my hands, and Israel my heritage." In Isaiah 45:1, the Persian king Cyrus, whose hand God
28 has taken hold of to subdue nations before him, is honoured by being anointed.

29 The elect people is rendered responsible for manifesting the radical grace of God in face of oth-
30 er peoples, for spreading this message, and for acting in such a way as to represent that grace.
31 It is also called to be a 'medium', through which all nations on earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3).

1 God is not a tribal God, but is the creator and sustainer of the whole cosmos. Each human being

2 is created in God's image, regardless of their religious affiliation. In Psalm 8, God is praised for

3 having "made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honour".

4 As a consequence, Christian faith has reason to expect the radical grace of God's creative activ-

5 ity to be at work in the realm of non-Christian religions, and even making use of their intellectual,

6 practical, ethical, and ritual resources. Christian core beliefs teach to honour non-Christians as

7 fellow-creatures, made in the image of God, who deserve unconditional love and respect.

8 **4.1.2. The radical grace of God's salvific activity**

9 „The Son is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being" (Hebrews

10 1:3). The fact that God represented this being in a human person, the incarnation of God's eter-

11 nal word, was a further realization of radical grace. From Jesus Christ, that grace radiated to the

12 disciples who were in his immediate presence, to those whom he met when he was on the way

13 through Galilee and to Jerusalem, and to those who later heard of his message and of the gos-

14 pel of his death and resurrection and were inspired by his spiritual presence. Luther once called

15 Jesus Christ the "mirror of the fatherly heart". In him, "the true light, which enlightens everyone,

16 was coming into the world" (John 1:9).

17 On the other hand, Jesus distinguished himself from God (Mark 10:18 and 13:32; Matthew

18 20:23), and directed the attention away from his own person to the dawning reign of God. In

19 granting communion with God to those who were socially marginalized, who did not belong to

20 'his' ethnic and religious group, and who thus were despised by their fellow humans, he mediat-

21 ed God's radical grace. In being totally open for God, he let God act through him without re-

22 sistance due to human sinfulness. According to the Gospel of John, he is not seeking his "own

23 glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge" (John 8:50).

24 He did not claim divine honour but "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death

25 – even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). In exalting him, and taking him into his community,

26 God proved to be a God of life, who has abolished all bondage keeping humans away from God:

27 sin, law and death. Not only the incarnated Word, but the eternal Word of God, strives for the

28 salvation of the creatures. God's radical grace is salvific grace.

29 If the grace incarnated in Jesus is radical because it is rooted solely in God, and in being univer-

30 sal and unconditioned by human works and beliefs, then we need to think that it extends beyond

31 the 'visible' community of Christian faith. God's radical and universal grace, as represented and

32 mediated by and through Jesus Christ, is not confined to the religion which bears his name, but

1 reaches beyond the media of the Christian religion. Christians can expect that the all-embracing,

2 benevolent spiritual presence of God represents itself salvifically beyond that religion.

3 Christians can discover "shapes of grace" (Tillich) in other religions. The radical grace as it is

4 revealed in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ is the criterion for the discernment of spirits –

5 not so much by his name but more through the will of God as represented in his person, in his

6 preaching, and acting (Matthew 7:21). Making use of that criterion might lead Christians to dis-

7 cover also the authentic love of God and of one's neighbour, struggle for justice and liberation in

8 the name of God, caring and healing communities, and so on in non-Christian religions – some-

9 times even more than in their own religion. God's eternal Word may speak in languages 'foreign'

10 to Christians. It can thereby intensify faith in Christ as the incarnation of that eternal Word.

11 **4.1.3. The radical grace of God's inspiring activity**

12 God's creative and salvific grace, as represented in, and mediated through, Jesus Christ, "is not

13 far from each one of us" (Acts 17:27). In the power of God's spirit, he comes near; opens hearts;

14 creates faith, love, and hope; promotes understanding, reconciliation, and forgiveness; leads

15 into communion; renews relationships; inspires our orientation of life; widens the horizons of our

16 consciousness. God's Spirit can be, and certainly is, at work where and when it wills (John 3:8).

17 The spiritual omnipresence encompasses and pervades the whole cosmos: nature and history,

18 including the history of religions.

19 This omnipresence is concentrated in the church – understood as a spiritual movement, as a

20 dynamic field of force of God's Spirit in history which empowers, gathers, edifies and sends men

21 and women to be witnesses of God's radical grace in the world. It is, however, not restricted to

22 the church as a religious institution.

23 Christians thus can assume that God's spiritual power is at work in other religious communities.

24 Traces of its activity can be seen wherever love grows, where compassion and solidarity come

25 to the fore, where humans transcend their selfishness. God's spirit is the power of life; it creates

26 and heals life. It empowers life and drives back everything which constrains or destroys life. It is

27 also the power of new life which is not threatened by death. Wherever life is brought forth and

28 nurtured, redeemed from slavery and led to its fulfilment in God as the source of life, such fruits

29 can be attributed to the spirit of God.

30 Being creative, salvific, and inspiring, the three-dimensional radical grace of God is universal. It

31 reaches beyond the history of Christianity, beyond the church, and beyond the explicit proclama-

32 tion of the Gospel, into the entire cosmos. It affects all human beings. What is required therefore

33 is a respectful and attentive communication with adherents of other religions, as well as a theo-

1 logical respect for the expressions or practices of these religions. "Shapes of grace" could be
2 embedded in them.

3 That is not to say that religions (including Christianity) as such, and in general, are paths to sal-
4 vation. Religions also mirror human sinfulness. The spirit of God often works not in, but against
5 religious expressions and practices. Paul rightly asks for discrimination as concerns the spirit,
6 and gives us hints as to how to discover "fruits of the spirit" (Galatians 5:16-26). Many religious
7 ideas and practices – even within the Christian religion – need scrutiny. They have to be seen in
8 the light of Jesus Christ, which also sheds a critical light on them. Christ is the criterion.

9 Assuming that there are "shapes of grace" in the non-Christian religions does not mean relativiz-
10 ing the divine truth revealed in Jesus Christ. On the contrary, it expresses the insight that this
11 truth is the radical and universal nature of God's grace. For Protestant Christians the appropriate
12 response to the radical gracious God is faith.

13 4.2 Truth in Christian faith

14 Christians believe in the triune God, who is radically gracious. God lives out grace in creative,
15 salvific, and inspiring activity. In Jesus Christ, God has represented and is continuously repre-
16 senting the radical grace which is God's very essence in a human person (cf. Hebrews 1:3).
17 Therefore Christians believe that in Jesus Christ the truth of God is revealed, not in the sense of
18 a prophetic information, but in such a way that the Gospel of John can call Jesus Christ himself
19 the truth. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through
20 me" (John 14:6).

21 The Biblical understanding of truth is embedded in the story of God's faithfulness to God's peo-
22 ple, thus it is fundamentally experiential, relational and personal, without being only subjective.

23 4.2.1. Living in the truth of God's radical grace

24 The question of truth is addressed in the gospels when, during the trial of Jesus, Pontius Pilate
25 asks "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Jesus has just stated that "everyone who belongs to the truth
26 listens to my voice" (John 18:37). This brings out a close relation between truth and belonging,
27 intellectual understanding and practical orientation. Living in the truth means living in an intimate
28 relation to God by belonging to Christ.

29 The implications of this understanding of God is already discussed in the New Testament, cul-
30 minating in the disputes of the Apostle Paul with the Apostle Peter, when the former is referring
31 to the truth of the Gospel in order to interpret the whole story of Jesus Christ in the light of God's
32 radical grace which calls forth a response in faith and trust (cf. Galatians 2).

1   Human beings live in the truth, when they orient their lives in faith fully in the horizon of the radi-

2   cally gracious God. Truth in this sense is a practical category; it is a lived-out truth, which differ-

3   entiates the life of a human being between his or her old and new life. This new life is a life in

4   the truth.

5   **4.2.2. Truth as an existential category**

6   Christian theology sometimes in the past applied a theoretical framework of truth that assumed

7   we could grasp the 'reality' of God like we can grasp the empirical reality of the spatio-temporal

8   world around us. Yet, what faith is about is not primarily knowledge about supernatural facts.

9   Faith is about the promise of God given to Israel and in Jesus Christ to all human beings, which

10 calls forth a response in trusting in these promises. Trust in God orients the lives of human be-

11 ings towards Jesus Christ in the inspiration of God's Spirit. The truth of faith is a truth about the

12 life-giving promises of God and God's loyalty and faithfulness. So God's reality is experienced in

13 faith in a specific way, which is the basis for formulating the truth of it not only in hymns and

14 prayers, but as well in propositions.

15 Of course, the truth of Christian faith is experienced in faith as an existential and experiential,

16 personal and relational truth. The Hebrew word which is translated as "truth" is "emet". It means

17 reliability, trustworthiness, credibility, steadiness, fidelity. It indicates a quality of relationship.

18 Truth in that understanding needs to be performed (John 3:21). So it is as well theoretical as

19 practical in nature.

20 Reliability, trustworthiness, credibility, and all the qualities of relationships are only possible if

21 there is someone to trust and rely on. The theoretical framework of the truth question in Chris-

22 tian theology was misleading, when it treated God like a definite spatio-temporal object. But it is

23 similarly misleading if critiquing a specific theoretical model in the history of theology means

24 giving up the idea of a correspondence of truth. Understanding truth as a practical concept, in

25 the tradition of the biblical concept of "emet", also implies a correspondence of the tenets of faith

26 with the one to whom faith relates.

27 In a practical, personal understanding of truth like in a theoretical understanding of truth, in the

28 last instance, Godself and God's Word are the truth. There is a close connection between

29 "truth", the "way" of practicing the truth, and "life" which the divine truth intends to promote. In

30 John 14:6 that connection is clearly expressed. 'Being in the truth' of God means being on the

31 way to true life, which is the way Christ has prepared.

4.2.3. Living in the truth provides space for encountering

This biblical understanding of truth has consequences for the encounter with adherents of other religions. The truth of the Christian faith has nothing to do with religious imperialism. It has nothing to do with a sense of superiority which denies the truth claims of other religions. It exists in, and with, the persons who live in it.

If religious assertions are understood in this sense as being personal and existential witnesses to the truth, they will enable us to respect and esteem the expressions of truth by other people who belong to other religions. Truth about faith, love and hope cannot claim to be existentially an absolute truth for every human being. Distinguishing between the truth and the truth of religious assertions is an important condition for interreligious (as well as for ecumenical) dialogue. Assuming that God's truth is more comprehensive than all the religious truths certainly does not relativize the confidence of the believers in the truth of God.

An open interreligious encounter grows from human curiosity, interest in knowledge and interest in communication with our fellow human beings. It can be lived out in a relaxed way on the basis of our own religious certainty, under the condition of freedom of religion in society. Interreligious dialogue can be particularly fruitful when participants are well informed about their own religion and are confident in the foundations of their own certainty of the truth. It may well be important to acknowledge that religious truth needs to be inspired by the truth of God, "who lives in unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 1:16). Only a person who is open for being addressed by God's word again and again, can really understand other persons who are reaching out to encounter God in other ways of understanding and devotion. So strengthening our knowledge about our own faith can stimulate an interest in respectfully encountering adherents of other faiths. Such interest involves the possibility that the understandings, doctrines and practices we bring to the encounter will be seriously questioned, and could be changed and extended. The tradition held by others may come to appear in a new light, but so may our own tradition. Christians can even expect that the radical gracious God expresses Godself through the manifestations of non-Christian religions, so that those manifestations can become sources of theological inspiration and transformation. This experience can be challenging, and indeed perturbing. But it can also give the horizons of our own faith, and our reflections on it, a breadth and depth they did not have before.

4.3   A closer look at biblical texts regarding religious plurality

How can an understanding of the truth of faith, which is open to communication with the adherents of other religions, and interested in encountering them, be compatible with exclusive claims

1 found in the New Testament? Acts 4:12 says "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no
2 other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." Another prominent
3 example is the claim of Jesus Christ "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to
4 the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

5 These claims, and others like them in the Bible, seem to challenge the openness to interreli-
6 gious dialogue and its interest, as well as the attitude of accepting and respecting other reli-
7 gions, other religious practices, and perhaps even their followers. In the interpretation of biblical
8 texts concerning the relation of Christians to people of other faiths, we have to consider the his-
9 torical context and probably the conflicts expressed in the respective statements. In the past,
10 there has sometimes been a misuse of some biblical texts because they were taken as a time-
11 less and everlasting truth, and not considered expressions of specific historical constellations
12 and conflicts. A well-known example of this is the wrongful use of the anti-Judaic statements
13 found in the New Testament – like Matthew 27:25 ("Then the people as a whole answered, 'His
14 blood be on us and on our children!'"), John 8:44 ("You are from your father the devil") or
15 1Thessalonians 2:15 ("who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they
16 displease God and oppose everyone") – to justify of a general hostility of Christians to Jews.

17 Furthermore, the biblical texts which claim Jesus Christ as the only way to salvation, have been
18 used to oppose other religions, even those which did not exist in biblical times – like Islam – and
19 which the biblical authors knew nothing about (such as the Eastern Asian religions).

4.3.1. Old Testament

21 The Old Testament presupposes and, in most of its parts, states that there are other gods be-
22 side Yahweh. It acknowledges that different people have different gods. In the process of its
23 formation, the Jewish people learned to understand their various gods (like the gods of the Fa-
24 thers) as being in fact the same God, who revealed himself as Yahweh (see e.g. Exodus 6:2;
25 Exodus 3:13-15). This God is nevertheless different from the various gods of the other people.
26 This is expressed in God's claim of exclusivity in the first of the Ten Commandments, "Then God
27 spoke all these words, 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of
28 the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me'" (Exodus 20:1-3, see Deuterono-
29 my 5:7). In first instance, the emphasis of this commandment is not the claim that there is only
30 the God of Israel (monotheism), but the obligation of the people of Israel to obey and serve only
31 this God (monolatry). Deuteronomy 4:19-20 can even say that the God of Israel has given the
32 celestial deities (like the stars) to other people; as for himself, he has chosen the people of Isra-
33 el. Micah 4:5 states, "For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in
34 the name of the Lord our God forever and ever".

1 The many assertions in the Old Testament which denounce the cult and rituals of other peoples
2 (especially the Canaanite worship of Baal) as idolatry - like 2Kings 17:7ff; 21:1ff; Psalms 31, 78,
3 96, 97, 106, 115, 135, and the books of the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea, also
4 presuppose that these peoples have their own gods. From the perspective of Yahweh, these
5 gods are evaluated critically. The often polemical tone of these texts indicates that this critique
6 does not really refer to these gods, but rather warns the people itself against an exaggerated
7 adaptation and assimilation of the Jewish religion to the Canaanite religion.

8 In a late development, the theology of the Old Testament questioned the existence of other
9 gods. It developed the understanding that the gods of other peoples were only seemingly gods.
10 This is a consequence of the monotheism worked out during the Babylonian exile, where Yah-
11 weh was compared with other gods. In Isaiah, this comparative way of considering the plurality
12 of Gods is addressed critically with monotheistic statements (see Isaiah 40:18.25; 44:6-8; 46:9).
13 To comfort the expatriates, and to raise their hopes, the prophet shows that the gods of the oth-
14 er people are not only powerless and silent, but that they do not even exist, because they are
15 identical with their temporal images created by human beings. Being different from these gods,
16 Yahweh can truly claim, "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god" (Isaiah
17 44:6; see as well Isaiah 43:10-11: "Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after
18 me. I am the Lord, and besides me there is no saviour"; see as well Isaiah 45:14.18.21-22; Deu-
19 teronomy 4:1-40).

20 This shows a development in the understanding of God in the Old Testament: the claim of an
21 exclusive worship of Yahweh in Israel during the course of history is increasingly understood as
22 a critical evaluation of the gods of other peoples, considered as pseudo-gods only. Consequent-
23 ly, Yahweh was understood to be not only the God of his people, but of all people and of the
24 whole universe. The universality of God's activity is emphasized, e.g. in the book of Jonah when
25 the prophet has to learn that the grace of God goes beyond the people of Israel. In Psalm 67,
26 God is praised for judging the peoples with equity and guiding the nations upon earth. According
27 to Amos 9:7, he has not only brought Israel from Egypt, but has also brought the Philistines from
28 Caphtor, and the Arameans from Kir – guiding even people who do not worship him. In Isaiah
29 19:24f, Isaiah 45:1 and Jeremiah 27:4-11, we find more examples of God guiding and directing
30 other people. Malachi 1:11 even states that Yahweh is worshipped in other nations.

31 In the Old Testament, however, the other nations are not called to worship Yahweh. One can
32 find in some parts of the Old Testament the idea of a pilgrimage of all peoples to the Zion, the
33 earthly seat of Yahweh. This has to be understood as an acknowledgment of Yahweh as the
34 universal God (see Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-4). Apart from that, even when Yahweh is under-

1 stood to be the only true God, and to act universally, he still is seen as exclusively worshipped

2 by the people of Israel. Although this God also governs all other people, only the people of Israel

3 is called to, and obliged to worship this God.

4 The Old Testament does not grant much interest in general statements on the essence and

5 general activity of God. The focus is on the narrative of God's relation to his people. In this per-

6 spective, God is understood as the creator of the whole universe, who has created every single

7 human being in God's own image, and entered into the universal covenant with all human be-

8 ings (see Genesis 1 and 9).

9 **4.3.2. New Testament**

10 We also find in the New Testament some of the motifs known from the Old Testament, as well

11 as a critique of the turning away of people from God. This critique is partly directed against the

12 fellow Jews, and is partly universal and directed to other – non-Jewish – peoples and even to all

13 human beings. This is expressed for example in Romans 1:18-32, where it is claimed that God

14 has shown all human beings what can be known about him. Therefore, "they are without ex-

15 cuse; for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him" (Ro-

16 mans 1:20-21). In 1 Corinthians 10:20, we find the claim that the Gods the pagans sacrifice to

17 are not really gods, but only demons. This continues the perspective of the Old Testament. In

18 line with this critique of religions, people converting from their former religion to Christian faith is

19 seen as a turn "to God from idols, to serve a living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Still in

20 line with the later developments in Old Testament, it is stated that "the Gentiles ... do not know

21 God" (1 Thessalonians 4:5), although the God known in Israel is universally God. These New

22 Testament texts (and others) illustrate the ongoing reflection, known from the Old Testament, on

23 the God of Israel increasingly understood universally as the God of all human beings. In this

24 line, we find reflections in the New Testament about the consequences of this understanding of

25 God, which to the Apostle Paul finally became fully clear and distinct in Jesus Christ. The God of

26 Israel, witnessed by Jesus and indeed rendered visible and incarnate in Jesus himself, is the

27 radical gracious God of all human beings! In the New Testament writings, especially in the let-

28 ters of Paul, we can observe the authors of the various texts struggling with the consequences

29 of this understanding of God. These consequences were not always and everywhere the same.

30 They depended on the contexts in which the participants in these discourses lived as well, as on

31 the problems they experienced. Therefore this discussion about the consequences of the under-

32 standing of the universality of God did not finish in the New Testament but went on throughout

33 history.

1   The New Testament documents some conflicts, in very polemic expressions directed against the
2   fellow Jews. These polemical phrases are of no use for a contemporary general definition of the
3   Christian relation to Judaism. They are of no use either in defining the relations between Christi-
4   anity and other religions, because they are specific to Christian-Jewish relations in the first cen-
5   tury, in particular regional settings.

6   A definition of the relationship between Christianity and other religions needs primarily to be
7   found in the teaching and practice of Jesus, as expressed in the testimony of the four gospels.
8   Secondly, faith in Jesus Christ needs to be considered through its expression in many voices
9   and reflected in all the writings of the New Testament.

10 Jesus understood himself as sent to the Jews (Matthew 15:24). Consequently, he also sent his
11 disciples to the Jews (Matthew 10:5f.) and had no reason to deal with non-Jewish religions and
12 cults, and their respective gods. He did not, for example, mention the multireligious situation in
13 the Hellenistic town of Sepphoris, which was only eight kilometres away from his hometown
14 Nazareth. We do not know of words of judgement from his mouth about other people and cults.
15 But he warned his own followers to take his invitation seriously, otherwise God would invite oth-
16 ers (Matthew 8:11f; Luke 14:16-24); so he was aware at least of the possibility of God relating
17 himself to other people.

18 In his preaching, Jesus praised even non-Jews for being elected by God, like the widow of Za-
19 rephath to whom the prophet Elijah was sent by God, unlike the many other widows in Israel
20 (Luke 4:26), or Naaman from Syria, who was the only one cleansed among the many lepers
21 found in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha (Luke 4:27). As an example of faith, he pointed
22 to the woman from Canaan (or Syrophoenicia), whose daughter he healed (Matthew 15:21-28),
23 or to the (Roman) captain from Capernaum, who asked Jesus to help his sick servant (Matthew
24 8:5-13).

25 The gospel narratives tell that the people of Nineveh followed the preaching and call for repent-
26 ance of the prophet Jonah (Luke 11:30-32), and Jesus let the foreign exorcist do his job as long
27 as he was doing it in Jesus' name (Mark 9:38-40). In the parable of the merciful Samaritan, Je-
28 sus emphasized not the priest, nor the Levite who rushed to worship in Jerusalem, but a man
29 from Samaria, whose people were considered to be without Yahweh, helping in an altruistic way
30 a man who was robbed (Luke 10:29-37). In John 4, Jesus was sitting beside a woman from Sa-
31 maria next to a fountain; he stayed in her village for two days.

32 Overall, in the gospels it is obvious that for Jesus neither social nor religious boundaries were
33 crucial, when the kingdom of God was at stake. Jesus mainly interacted with Jews. But in Sa-
34 maria or in the Northern boundaries of Galilee, he obviously had contact with people of other

1 ethnic groups and other faith, and this was no problem for him. He seems to have encountered

2 these people with the same attitude formed by his awareness for the nearness of the kingdom of

3 God. This God was for Jesus unconditionally and radically gracious. Here is the centre of the

4 message of Jesus Christ: God is striving for the salvation of all human beings. He is like a good

5 father to those who are lost, and is pursuing them like a good shepherd looking for each one of

6 his sheep (Luke 15). God is extending his invitation to a festive dinner to people far off from him,

7 when those first invited do not come (Luke 14:16-23). "Then people will come from East and

8 West, from North and South, and will eat in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29). For Jesus, the

9 confession of faith seems not to have been crucial. What mattered for him the doing and fulfilling

10 of God's will: active solidarity with people who are hungry, sick, foreign, in prison (Matthew

11 25:31ff). "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mark 3:35). Ac-

12 cording to Acts 10:34-35, Peter learned "that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone

13 who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him". In the light of the imminent kingdom

14 of God the traditional social, cultural and religious differences become less important, and even

15 actually irrelevant. The important thing is to live according to the nearness of the kingdom. To

16 acknowledge that the kingdom of God is at hand and to orient one's own life accordingly makes

17 the difference, compared to all the people who do not do so. Not all the people who Jesus ad-

18 dressed actually followed him. Some could not change their lives according the nearness of the

19 kingdom of God, in which God's justice is realized.

20 The inevitable consequence of the belief in the unconditional love and grace of God is that the

21 New Covenant extended beyond the Jewish people. Paul, especially, was arguing for this con-

22 sequence and the book of Acts gives witness to it as well. If there is no religious (or other) pre-

23 condition for God being gracious and loving, then principally nobody can be excluded from this

24 grace and love of God on the basis of their religious affiliation. Surely they can reject or ignore

25 this grace and love – and thus remain separated from God like through a profound abyss. But

26 God's will to save every human being embraces and integrates even such a separation and

27 parting, and brings back those who are separated.

28 According to Paul, God has revealed himself in the works of creation. Therefore, no creature

29 can appeal not to have access to this revelation (Romans 1:18-20). God has written the law into

30 the hearts of the heathen. In Acts 14:15-17, we learn that God will not be without witness among

31 the nations. And in Acts 17:22-31, Paul testifies to the citizens of Athens in his speech at the

32 Areopagus that the unknown God, whom they worship, is identical to the God of Israel that Je-

33 sus addressed as father. This God "is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move

34 and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring'"

35 (Acts 17:27-28).

What follows from this New Testament testimony as regards the relations of Christians with members of other religions? It is not in line with Jesus' example to fear contact and have reservations about them. Following the example of Jesus, Christians should show openness and interest in communication with people of other faiths. There are no limits or restrictions to dialogue with the adherents and representatives of other religions. Such dialogue and communication, in the first instance, has its meaning in itself. Consequently, communication with people of other faiths – which in fact concerns all aspects of life (economy, culture, family, science, politics), is respectful in religious terms: respecting the religious freedom of the partner of communication and acknowledging his or her religious autonomy. According the New Testament, Christians should view people of other faiths as Jesus viewed them, and in the way they are viewed by God. God's radical grace is addressed to them, like to all Christians, but also like atheists and agnostics. Because of that, and because of the acknowledgement of nowadays autonomy of every human being (which includes one's religion), religion and religious affiliations may be, and should be, part of the communication of people of different faiths as well. Because of God's radical grace, there are no limits, no boundaries, and no restrictions to address every human being – whatever kind of religious affiliation he or she has – with the entreaty "on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20). This is because it is the radically gracious God making this appeal to every single human being. Christians are God's ambassadors in this entreaty to be reconciled with God.

5. Living together in religiously plural societies

The previous chapter outlines a theological reasoning for the constructive engagement of Protestants with people of other faiths, which can be applied also to the encounter with people having no religious faith or affiliation. God's radical grace sets us free to interact with others with confidence and openness. The term most often used for such interaction is "dialogue", which entails confident speaking and attentive listening to all the partners involved. Furthermore, "dialogue" refers not only to the actual conversation between different people, but characterizes a basic attitude towards the other, a way of life or an ensemble of interaction.

Many people actively participate in the *dialogue of life* as neighbours, colleagues and friends. Instead of simply living side-by-side, different communities and different people intentionally and constructively want to live together and to relate to one another. The first of following sections introduces basic elements that constitute a dialogical culture (5.1.). The second section reflects on the challenges and possibilities of interreligious relations and dialogues (5.2.). A survey of possible areas of interreligious collaboration concludes this chapter (5.3.).

5.1 Developing a dialogical culture in living together

Protestant Christians and churches in Europe are actively involved in manifold dialogue pro-cesses on different levels. The themes and issues they deal with relate to theological and spir-itual matters as well as ethical and socio-political issues. Spontaneous dialogues emerge in eve-ryday life when people of different faiths live together as neighbours, family members, col-leagues, team-mates and citizens. Meetings between top-level religious leaders are arranged to discuss matters relevant to their communities and to society as a whole. For congregations and religious communities it has become an important practice to visit one another's places of wor-ship, and to meet and greet one another on the occasion of religious festivals. In youth work and religious education some playful new methods are introduced in order to give space for curiosity and engagement with others. Different forms of dialogical encounter are equally important as they respond to different needs.

Encounter and dialogue help to overcome fear and indifference vis-à-vis other religious commu-nities or even religion in general. Religion is regarded with suspicion or even hostility by quite a significant number of people in Europe. An increasing number of people seem religiously illit-erate, not understanding the nature of religious commitments. Others who belong to the Chris-tian community are afraid of contact with people of a different faith, or people with no religious faith as they do not know how to articulate their own faith and have hardly any experience in dealing with difference in religious matters. They withdraw into their community because they perceive it as a safe haven in an increasingly complex world. Such a withdrawal, however, coun-teracts the call of the church to engage with the world. This call also includes an encounter be-tween religious and non-religious people which should be included in a dialogical approach.

Among those who engage in dialogue there is a great variety of motivations for entering into dialogue. Some of them are:

- trying to understand how people of other faiths describe their faith journey, looking for re-liable information regarding other faiths;

- seeking to clarify misunderstandings between people of different faiths, participating in religious celebrations and rituals together;

- sharing your faith experiences with others;

- responding to theological challenges that are triggered through other faiths, listening to other faith experiences;

1   • establishing good neighbourly relations with people of other faiths and non-religious peo-
2   ple and groups;

3   • jointly advocating for people in need;

4   • working together in order to enhance solidarity and cohesion in society.

5 For some, dialogue is part of their spiritual journey; for others, dialogue is more of an intellectual
6 adventure. For others again it is a socio-political necessity. Regardless which dimension is at
7 the centre of a concrete dialogue process, dialogue is always a movement that tries to bridge
8 divided or fragmented entities and to foster understanding.

9 Without qualifying the act and aim of interreligious encounter/dialogue, it is clear that *religious*
10 difference is anticipated, expected and needed in order to call an activity interreligious dialogue,
11 interfaith dialogue or transreligious dialogue. It follows that the differences between the partici-
12 pants with regard to religious identity, belonging, and background are most commonly indicated
13 to be the most important differences. Cultural, social, ethnic, and gender differences are often
14 not signified in the same way. This does not mean that they do not exist. Nor does it imply that
15 these other differences are not crucial in meaning-making processes and the construction of
16 agencies within the dialogues. These other differences may sometimes actually play a greater
17 role than religious identity and representation in the dialogues. Depending on the context and
18 the relevant social, cultural and religious challenges facing the churches and the dialogues they
19 participate in, it is important to be more sensitive to other human differences and similarities
20 than to religious affiliation, belief, or background.

21 One of the characteristics of dialogue is that it somehow presupposes that dialogue partners
22 meet on an equal footing: both come to listen, and both come to talk. There is a joint commit-
23 ment to seek understanding. This assumption of equal participation in the concrete dialogue
24 process is being made in the midst of many differences and asymmetries. One important part of
25 the dialogue process is to come together in order to set the agenda together. Another assump-
26 tion that is vital for interreligious dialogue is the presupposition that faith is a living reality, creat-
27 ed and sustained by the living God. This implies that dialogue is not just an exchange about
28 fixed religious traditions, but about religious teachings and practices that relate to contemporary
29 challenges and take shape in the lives of concrete persons.

30 One of the key insights is that dialogue processes rely on educational processes that empower
31 people to participate in dialogue, but at the same time dialogue experiences are themselves
32 educational processes that form and transform people. This implies that the practice of dialogue
33 is a space for learning and for empowerment of those involved. Dialogue is a form of resistance

1   against two extremes: religious ignorance on the one side, and religious absolutism on the other
2   side. Those who engage in interreligious dialogue take religious commitments, and thereby also
3   difference, seriously. They challenge any relativistic or absolute views in matters of faith. Any
4   generalized talk about religiosity or spirituality will be questioned by the embodied and concrete
5   forms of faith that people actually adhere to and live out.

6   Interreligious dialogue is often very closely connected to intercultural dialogue. In recent years
7   there has been a growing awareness of the internal cultural diversity within each religious com-
8   munity. Sometimes, interreligious dialogue triggers intercultural dialogue and vice versa. Both
9   areas of dialogue are of high importance for the future of Europe. Whenever religious communi-
10   ties engage in such processes, where people learn to live with difference, this contributes in very
11   concrete ways to the wellbeing of the societies. Interreligious dialogue helps to overcome seg-
12   regation between communities, and empowers individuals to find their way in life, becoming ma-
13   ture believers and mature citizens.

14   ## 5.2   Interreligious relations and dialogues – challenges and possibilities

15   What kind of challenges and possibilities interreligious relationship-building and dialogues meet
16   will vary greatly according to the context and the people and groups involved. For some church-
17   es, their local context is not marked by religious diversity whereas others exist in a diverse envi-
18   ronment and may even be a religious minority as Protestants or as Christians. Sometimes the
19   challenge is to create space and opportunity for people of different religious affiliations to actual-
20   ly meet face to face or engage together in shared activities or to establish contact at all. But the
21   challenge can also be to create satisfactory premises for the encounter, based on equal part-
22   nership. Who to engage in a dialogue or encounter, what themes to address, where to meet and
23   what activities to perform are important issues to reflect on. The answers to these questions
24   shape the form and the content of the encounters.

25   Organized dialogue first and foremost involving religious leaders may be important to legitimize
26   the overall contact and legitimize dialogical encounters for the religious congregations and lay
27   people. On the other hand, exclusive meeting points for the leaders can represent limitations
28   regarding which voices are present and able to articulate their views in the dialogues, and they
29   can become male-dominated - as most religious leaders are men. Because the view on gender
30   and gender roles diverge between religious traditions and because these diverging views at the
31   same time are a source of conflict both between and within religious communities, this question
32   requires particular attention. For women clergy in Protestant churches attending interreligious
33   dialogues it is important that they be included by their male colleagues and leaders so that es-

1 tablishing a 'brotherhood' between religious leaders does not prevent them from being fully re-
2 spected partners in the dialogues. Participants in the dialogues should also avoid playing up
3 gender questions into polarized politics of identity. Rather, the religious traditions represented
4 can challenge each other in the encounters on the question of gender justice and the gap be-
5 tween ideal and practice in questions concerning gender and women's rights.

6 Sometimes interreligious dialogue and *diapraxis* is established as women's groups. These
7 groups are often close to the grassroots and everyday life, and may provide an important reality-
8 check for the more leader-oriented initiatives. To establish contact between such grass-roots
9 dialogues and the more leader-oriented dialogues is also important. The expectance of differ-
10 ences in an interreligious dialogue provides opportunities to address controversial issues. The
11 aim in a dialogue is not to come to a full unity, religiously speaking, or to agree on every matter,
12 but to establish relationships and friendship across differences. This means the space of dia-
13 logue is sometimes very open for sharing, and for some, more open than the space they will find
14 in their own community.

15 In some contexts, the level of conflict between different religious groups is low. In other places
16 tensions may be found, both on a local and national level. Contact, relationship-building and
17 dialogue is important in both cases. If there is a local or national conflict related to religion or
18 religious practice, it is important to interpret what is going on through several perspectives: What
19 is the religious component in the conflict? What are the social, cultural, political components? In
20 some cases, it may be important to decrease the focus on religion and religious identity and
21 increase the focus on other factors.

22 Religiously based identity-politics are challenging both for religious communities but also for the
23 relationship between the religious and the non-religious population. The churches have a task to
24 nurture the congregations' faith in Christ, and at the same time remain open for others. This
25 should also be reflected in the preaching and the general work of the churches, reflecting on co-
26 existence and respect for other religious (and non-religious) people and groups. In a Europe
27 where xenophobia, anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic/anti-Muslim attitudes are present, the churches
28 need to provide alternative, respectful and knowledge-based ways to talk about groups and
29 people and denounce any use of the Christian message as a platform for othering and de-
30 humanizing language and policies.

5.3   Cooperation in practical areas of interaction

32 One challenge that local communities, national governments and European institutions are cur-
33 rently dealing with is the significant number of refugees primarily from the war in Syria, and also

1 an increase in refugees and migrants from other conflict areas. Since summer 2014, the imme-
2 diate needs of the refugees and migrants as well as the longer term need for safety and belong-
3 ing have created an increased awareness for the humanitarian crisis. Civil society, including
4 many Protestant churches and other faith communities, has offered concrete practical assis-
5 tance and an atmosphere of hospitality and care. Among the Syrian refugees are Muslims and
6 Christians, and caring for the refugees in different ways may be one significant task for Muslim-
7 Christian dialogue groups and other dialogue efforts in the near future. Through establishing
8 meeting places and facilitating contact between the refugees and the church members as well
9 as the general population, there is a good chance of reducing mutual fear, and avoiding possible
10 friction and the acts hostile to refugees that have happened in a number of places.

11 A look back at historical developments within Europe reveals another phenomenon calling for
12 attention as it has left traces on the situation of religious communities today. In modern Europe-
13 an history, deep conflicts between religious communities have led to the secularization of the
14 state in many countries, thereby not only liberating the state from religious hegemony, but also
15 liberating religious communities from undue state interference. The secular state that has
16 emerged from this historical process provides a framework for different religious communities to
17 interact with one another and create shared space.

18 In recent decades, however, an immediate challenge has come to the fore in a number of Euro-
19 pean countries: not only have the state and its institutions been secularized, but also society and
20 the public sphere, even leading to the call to regard religion just as a private matter. From this
21 perspective, the plurality of religious commitments may be seen as a danger for the public
22 sphere, as it is potentially divisive.

23 In order to counter this call to tame and domesticate religious commitments, religious communi-
24 ties have the task to cultivate interreligious relations showing that there are indeed sustainable
25 and peaceful ways to deal with difference. Religious vitality is not a threat to the public sphere,
26 but a resource for a plural society. If societies do not try to push back religious commitments to
27 the private sphere, but acknowledge their public role, then one of the key areas needing atten-
28 tion is religious education. Religious education needs to equip believers with dialogue skills,
29 nurturing their religious literacy and empowering them to be active agents in dialogue. […] An-
30 other issue that has been addressed recently is the question of how religious leaders are being
31 trained, and how theological training can be offered at university level for different religious
32 communities. In a number of countries, new chairs for Islamic theology or confessional Islamic
33 studies have been established in order to respond to that need.

34 Interreligious councils and platforms are being established to create structures that enable regu-

1 lar and sustainable exchange among people of different faiths. There are initiatives, where peo-
2 ple of different communities come together and work together in order to address a specific
3 challenge in society or between religious communities help to deepen understanding of the
4 meaning of religious commitment and practice.

5 Neither the Protestant Christian traditions, nor the other living faith traditions in Europe, express
6 themselves as static or streamlined. There are local and contextual variations, different organi-
7 zations and various beliefs, doctrines and practice within the large traditions of e.g. Hinduism,
8 Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, and Christianity themselves. There is also diversity in non-
9 religious trends which include attitudes towards religion going from indifference to refusal. Seek-
10 ing knowledge about a dialogue partner or a neighbour's tradition is significant in order to under-
11 stand and engage. Knowledge can be sought through the actual encounters, and in studies and
12 literature about the traditions.

13 Protestant churches in Europe are involved in interreligious dialogues and encounters at many
14 levels and in different ways. The form and the levels of the dialogues are, for instance, depend-
15 ent on whether a Protestant church in a specific context is a majority or a minority church, as
16 well as on the structure and the presence of the other religious communities present in the dif-
17 ferent contexts. Most of the dialogues aim at building constructive and good relationships be-
18 tween people of different faiths as fellow citizens in a country, or as neighbours in a community.
19 Knowledge from each side about the other is important, but building trustful human relations is
20 the key to changing negative images and accepting differences. Knowledge, ability and skills in
21 articulating one's own faith challenge the Protestant churches in their educational activities.

22 New challenges for the churches are emerging from the religiously more diverse populations,
23 Religiously mixed marriages and multi-religious upbringing of children in many families raise the
24 questions of the baptism and blessing of babies. Interreligious wedding ceremonies/ liturgies are
25 sometimes requested, the same happens with funerals. Interreligious, shared prayers are ar-
26 ranged in some places. A number of young people develop double and triple religious belong-
27 ings, one shared with their families, another with friends. Experience shows that established,
28 well-functioning interreligious relations and dialogue may be good places to reflect over such
29 shared challenges. At the same time, the Protestant churches can find different ways to engage
30 with such challenges, from more restrictive to the more open. The challenge is not primarily to
31 keep the churches and its members out of all religious hybridization, but to embrace people's
32 need to belong to the church and at the same time have a partner, a child, or parts of their own
33 life in a different faith community. Religious diversity is also a fact in the life of individuals, not
34 only in social and political life. Radical grace combined with religious plurality is in Protestant

churches' contexts still a field in the making.

Shared narratives of mutual encounters in which trust is built do not only affect the people direct-ly involved in the dialogues, but also their colleagues, families, and friends, when these narra-tives are shared further. Ethically and socially shared responsibilities for urgent issues or local conflicts are often part of these. The most significant task of, for instance, Muslim-, Christian dialogue in Europe at the moment is probably to replace fear on both sides with mutual trust. But the shared challenges faced by religious communities in Europe are multi-faceted, and call for creating spaces of *diapraxis* in many social areas: religious education and teaching dialogical attitudes among young people, social care for asylum seekers and refugees, care for elderly people, and other activities known in the churches as diaconal work. Through acknowledging shared challenges in these areas, *diapraxis* may develop from the dialogues and strengthen the sense of community across religious boundaries. To a various degree, in different European locations, the future will bring more multi-religious families and interfaith marriages, as well as people with an experience of multiple religious belonging for various other reasons. If it can be shown that it is possible to create a shared humanity across religious and non-religious affilia-tions, this will be a valid witness to *radical grace*. It will also empower Europe's Protestants to emphasize a radical *relationally open* dimension in a multi-religious Europe.

Appendix 1: List of documents submitted by the CPCE member churches

Church	Title of Document	Year	Language	URL
Arnoldshainer Konferenz/ VE-LKD	Religionen, Religiosität und christlicher Glaube	1991	DE	- (cf. http://www.ekd.de/ezw/Publikationen_2608.php)
Protestant Church in Austria	Evangelische Christen und Muslime in Öster-reich. Eine Orientie-rungshilfe	2011	DE	http://www.rpi-virtuell.net/workspace/CFF7AB46-2FDA-475C-A6C7-3F92D3174C51/Web-IN-TRA/Ev.%20Christen%20u.%20Muslime%20%C3%96sterreich.pdf
Evangelical Church of	Einander mit Wert-schätzung begegnen. Zum Zusammenleben	2005	DE	http://www2.ekiba.de/download/Votum_EOK_KA_Islam_030505.pdf

Baden	von Christen und Muslimen in Baden			
Evangelical Church of Baden	Von Nachbarschaft zu Partnerschaft. Christen und Muslime in Baden. Ein Arbeitsbuch für Gemeinden und Dialoggruppen	2014	DE	www.ekiba.de/html/media/dl.html?i=52343
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria	Multireligiöses Beten. Handreichung	1992 [4]1999	DE	-
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria	Erste Schritte wagen. Eine Handreichung für die Begegnung von Kirchengemeinden mit ihren muslimischen Nachbarn	2000 [3]2009	DE	-
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria	Erste Schritte konkret. Gelungene Beispiele aus dem Arbeitsfeld des christlich-islamischen Dialogs …	2005?	DE	http://www.bayern-evangelisch.de/www/download/Broschuere_erste_schritte.pdf
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria	Begegnungen von Kirchengemeinden mit Muslimen, islamischen Gruppierungen und Moscheevereinen	2005	DE	http://www.bayern-evangelisch.de/www/download/Islam_komplett.pdf
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria	Ein überzeugtes "Ja". Praxishilfen für christlich-muslimische Trauungen	2012	DE	http://www.bayern-evangelisch.de/www/img/elkb12_hr_trauung_neu.pdf
Evangelical Church of Berlin – Brandenburg – Silesian Upper Lusatia	Diskussionsbeitrag: Grundlagen für den Dialog	2012/13	DE	http://www.berliner-missions-werk.de/fileadmin/documents/Grundlagen_des_Dialogs.pdf
Evangelical Church of Berlin – Brandenburg – Silesian Upper Lu-	Theologische Grundlagen zur Begegnung und zum Dialog mit Menschen anderen Glaubens, mit anderer Religionszugehörigkeit	2012/13	DE	http://www.berliner-missions-werk.de/fileadmin/documents/Theologische_Grundlagen.pdf

satia				
Reformed Churches Bern-Jura-Solothurn	Er hat Liebe und Barmherzigkeit zwischen euch gesetzt – Handreichung für die Trauung von christlich-muslimischen Paaren	2007	DE	http://www.refbejuso.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Downloads/OeME_Migration/OM_Pub_christ-muslim_Trauung.pdf
	"Il a mis entre vous de l'affection et de la bonté" – Guide pour le mariage de couples islamo-chrétiens		FR	http://www.refbejuso.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Downloads/Francais/PDF_divers/mariages_couples_islamo-chretiens.pdf
British Council of Churches	Relations with people of other faiths: guidelines on dialogue in Britain	1981	EN	-
Conference of the Churches on the Rhine	Freedom of religion as a human right in Christianity and Islam	2009	DE/FR (summary in EN)	
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark	Mission and dialogue	2006	EN	https://religionsmoede.dk/_Resources/Persistent/0/8/4/2/08427ac7d8143c33f3d91ede4f9ba4fbef0584c1/Mission%20and%20dialogue.pdf
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark	Rapport fra lytterunde blandt muslimske organisationer og moskeer[21]	2006	Danish	http://religionsmoede.dk/_Resources/Persistent/7/f/e/4/7fe4378d001f6f7f369fc0ecfff6e86 27fd5c0dd/rapport-lytterunde-muslimer-1.pdf
EKD	Zusammenleben mit Muslimen in Deutschland. Gestaltung der christlichen Begegnung mit Muslimen	2000	DE	http://www.ekd.de/glauben/44716.html
EKD	Christlicher Glaube und nichtchristliche Religionen	2003	DE	http://www.ekd.de/download/Texte_77.pdf

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[21]   Cf.   Mogens   S.   Mogensen: The   Christian-Muslim   Dialogue   Forum   in   Denmark (https://religionsmoede.dk/_Resources/Persistent/5/a/6/3/5a63d9baaae6c27d04d1c58acfdfb19dfe59c3ad/The%20Christian-Muslim%20Dialogue%20Forum%20in%20Denmark.pdf).

EKD	Klarheit und gute Nachbarschaft. Christen und Muslime in Deutschland	2006	DE	http://www.ekd.de/download/ekd_texte_86.pdf
EKD	„... denn ihr seid selbst Fremde gewesen" - Vielfalt anerkennen und gestalten	2009	DE	https://www.ekd.de/ekdtext_108.htm
EKD	Religiöse Orientierung gewinnen. Evangelischer Religionsunterricht als Beitrag zu einer pluralitätsfähigen Schule	2014	DE	https://www.ekd.de/ekd_de/ds_doc/20141106_denkschrift_evangelischer_religionsunterricht.pdf
EKD	Christlicher Glaube und religiöse Vielfalt in evangelischer Perspektive	2015	DE	http://www.ekd.de/download/christlicher_glaube.pdf
EKD/ Koordinationsrat der Muslime	Dialogratgeber zur Förderung der Begegnung zwischen Christen und Muslimen in Deutschland Guidelines for encouraging dialogue between Chris-tians and Muslims in Germany	2015	DE EN	http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/dialogratgeber_christen_muslime.html http://www.ekd.de/english/guidelines_christians_muslimes.html
Eglise Protestante Unie de France	Choisir la confiance	2013	FR	http://www.eglise-protestante-unie.fr/Toutes-les-actualites/Choisir-la-confiance2 (pamphlet about the church with short references to its position on interreligious affairs)
Fédération Protestante de France	Quel accueil pour les couples protestants – musulmans dans nos Églises ?	2013	FR	-
(Lutheran) Church of Hungary	Glaubensfreiheit und neue Religionsbewegungen	1997	Hungarian	
Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau	In Vielfalt leben – Gott auf der Spur sein Life in Diversity – On God's Trail	2003	DE EN	http://www.zentrum-oekumene-ekhn.de/fileadmin/content/Materialien/Dokumentationen/04-In-Vielfalt-leben--Gott-auf-der-Spur-sein.pdf http://www.zentrum-oekumene-

				ekhn.de/fileadmin/content/Materialien/Life_in_diversity_2003.pdf
Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau	**Lobet und preiset ihr Völker!** Religiöse Feiern mit Menschen muslimischen Glaubens	2011	DE	http://www.zentrum-oekumene-ekhn.de/fileadmin/content/Materialien/Dokumentationen/Broschueren/lobet_und_preiset.pdf
Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau	Wenn Christen und Muslime in der Schule beten	2014	DE	-
Evangelical Church of Hesse Electorate-Waldeck	Ermutigung und Befähigung zur Begegnung von Christen und Muslimen	2008	DE	http://www.ekkw.de/media_ekkw/downloads/ekkw_handreichung_christen_muslime.pdf
Evangelical Church of Hesse Electorate-Waldeck	Seelsorge und kirchliche Begleitung christlich-muslimischer Paare	2014	DE	http://www.ekkw.de/media_ekkw/downloads/ekkw_140311_texte_seelsorge_begleitung_christlich_muslimischer_paare.pdf
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	Církev československá husitská ve vztahu k ekumeně (The Czechoslovak Hussite Church in Relation to Ecumenism)	2014	Czech EN	http://www.ccsh.cz/snem.php?part=1#part
Lausanne Movement	The Cape Town Commitment	2010	EN	https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment
Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization	Understanding Muslims	2004	EN	http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP49_IG20.pdf
Methodist Church in Britain	Faith Meeting Faith	2001	EN	http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/if-faithmeetingfaith-0110.pdf
Methodist Church in Britain	May I call you friend? Sharing our faith in with people of other faiths	2006	EN	http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/if-mayicallyoufriend-0110.pdf
UMC Germany	Als Christ mit religiöser Vielfalt leben	2012	DE	-

UMC Central/Southern Europe	Den Islam verstehen (six texts)	1998-2000	EN / DE	http://www.emk-kircheundgesellschaft.ch/de/themen-und-dokumente/a-j/islam.html
UMC Central/ Southern Europe	Ratgeber zu interreligiösen Veranstaltungen	2006	DE/ FR	-
European Methodist Council	Der Fremde in unserer Mitte	1999	DE	http://www.emk-kircheundgesell-schaft.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/kircheundgesellschaft/Themen%20und%20Dokumente/A-J/Asyl-Migration/fremde.pdf
World Methodist Council	Wesleyan/Methodist Witness in Christian and Islamic cultures	2004	EN	http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Statement-on-Islamic-Culture.pdf
			DE	http://www.emk-kircheundgesell-schaft.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/kircheundgesellschaft/Themen%20und%20Dokumente/A-J/Islam/weltrat_zu_islam.pdf
UMC	Our Muslim Neighbors	2004		http://www.emk-kircheundgesell-schaft.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/kircheundgesellschaft/Themen%20und%20Dokumente/A-J/Islam/our_muslim_neighbors.pdf
UMC	Called to Be Neighbors and Witnesses: Guidelines for Interreligious Relationships	1980-2008	EN	http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=lwL4KnN1LtH&b=4951419&ct=6480553
			DE	http://www.emk-kircheundgesell-schaft.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/kircheundgesellschaft/Themen%20und%20Dokumente/K-Z/Religionsdialog/interreligioeserdialog.pdf
			FR	
Protestant Church in the Netherlands	Integrity and Respect. Islam Memorandum	2011	EN	http://www.pkn.nl/Lists/PKN-Bibliotheek/Integrity-and-Respect-Islammemorandum-20110309.pdf
North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran	In guter Nachbarschaft. Christlich-islamischer Dialog im Bereich der Nordelbi-	2006	DE	http://nordelbien.de/download/synode_statements/reader.pdf

Church	schen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche			(several translations incl. EN)
North Elbi-an Evan-gelical Lutheran Church	Interreligiöses Lernen in Schulen in Schles-wig-Holstein	2009	DE	-
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Northern Germany	Gute Nachbarschaft leben. Informationen und Beispiele zur För-derung des christlich-islamischen Dialogs in der Nordkirche	2013	DE	http://www.nordkirche-welt-weit.de/fileadmin/user_upload/zmoe/media/InterreligioeserDialog/christlich-islamischerDia-log/Gute_Nachbarschaft_leben_pdf.pdf
Church of Norway	Guiding Principles For Interreligious Relations	2008	EN	– http://www.kirken.no/english/doc/engelsk/Principles_interreligious_relations_08.pdf
Church of Norway	Guidance for religion encounter	2006	EN	http://www.kirken.no/?event=doLink&famID=37261 (look for "Veiledning i religionsmøte")
Church of Norway	When believers meet	2007	EN	http://www.kirken.no/english/doc/engelsk/believers_meet_07_08.pdf
Church of Norway	Sier vi. Ressursmate-riell om antisemittisme, islamofobi og antisiga-nisme	2013	NOR	http://siervi.no/
Church of Norway	Religionsmøtet ved kirkelige handlinger	2016	NOR	https://kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/bispemotet/2016/dokumenter/bispemoetet_februar_2016_religionsmoetet_kirkelige_handlinger.pdf
Church of Norway (collabora-ting)	Beate Fagerli et al. (red.): *Dialogteologi på norsk.* Verbum 2016	2016	NOR	
Evangelical Church in the Rhine-land	Abraham und der Glaube an den einen Gott Abraham and Belief in the one God	2009	DE (EN)	http://www.ekir.de/www/downloads/EKiR_Arbeitshilfe_Abraham_2009_deutsch.pdf -
Evangelical Church of the Rhine-land	Christen und Muslime nebeneinander vor dem einen Gott. Zur Frage gemeinsamen Betens	1997	DE	-
Evangelical Church of	Mission und Dialog in der Begegnung mit	2002	DE	-

the Rhine-land	Muslimen			
Evangelical Church in the Rhine-land	Religionsfreiheit ge-stalten	2012	DE	http://www.ekir.de/www/downloads/ekir2012religionsfreiheit.pdf
Evangelical Church in the Rhine-land	Weggemeinschaft und Zeugnis im Dialog mit Muslimen	2015	SE	http://www.ekir.de/www/service/weggemeinschaft-zeugnis-19148.php
Church of Scotland	Mission and evange-lism in a multifaith society and a multifaith world	1993	EN	-
Church of Sweden	Sann mot sig själv – öppen mot andra	2011	SWE	http://www.svenskakyrkan.se/default.aspx?id=825833
Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches	Wahrheit in Offenheit La vérité dans l'ouverture	2007	DE FR	http://www.kirchenbund.ch/sites/default/files/publikationen/pdf/SEK-Position-8.pdf http://www.kirchenbund.ch/sites/default/files/publikationen/pdf/FEPS-Position-8.pdf
Reformed Church of the Canton Vaud	Préparation et célébra-tion d'une bénédiction de mariage entre un(e) partenaire protes-tant(e) et un(e) parte-naire musulman(e). Recommandations du conseil synodal	2003	FR	-
Waldensi-an Church	L'Ecumenismo e il dialogo interreligioso	1998	Ita-lian	http://www.chiesavaldese.org/pages/archivi/documenti/doc_ecumenismo.pdf
Waldensi-an Church	Religioni, dialogo, integrazione	2011	Ita-lian	http://www.interno.gov.it/mininterno/export/sites/default/it/assets/files/26/2013_06_18_vademecum_esecutivo_low.pdf
Waldensi-an Church	Carta di Milano	2013	Ita-lian	http://www.chiesadimilano.it/polopoly_fs/1.71698.1362039776!/menu/standard/file/Carta%20di%20Milano%202013.pdf
Evangelical Church of Westphalia	Mission – Missions-verständnis – Dialog mit anderen Religio-nen	2004	DE	http://www.evangelisch-in-westfa-len.de/fileadmin/ekvw/dokumente/stellungnahmen/mission.pdf
Evangelical Church of Württem-	Begegnen – Feiern – Beten. Handreichung zur Frage interreligiöser Feiern	2003	DE	http://www.elk-wue.de/fileadmin/mediapool/elkwue/dokumente/begegnen_feiern_beten.pdf

berg	von Christen und Muslimen			
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Württem-berg	Miteinander leben lernen. Evangelische Christen und Muslime in Württemberg	2006	DE	http://www.elk-wue.de/fileadmin/mediapool/elkwue/dokument e/landessynode/Erklaerung13Landessynode_ ChristenundMuslime_2006.pdf
World Council of Churches (WCC)	Guidelines on Dia-logue with People of Living Faiths and Ideo-logies Leitlinien zum Dialog mit Menschen ver-schiedener Religionen und Ideologien Lignes directrices sur le dialogue avec les religions et idéologies de notre temps	1979	EN DE FR	http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/docu ments/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/guidelines-on-dialogue-with-people-of-living-faiths-and-ideologies http://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/docu ments/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/guidelines-on-dialogue-with-people-of-living-faiths-and-ideologies?set_language=de http://www.oikoumene.org/fr/resources/docum ents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/guidelines-on-dialogue-with-people-of-living-faiths-and-ideologies?set_language=fr
WCC	Theological Perspecti-ves on Plurality	1990	EN	http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/docu ments/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/baar-statement-theological-perspectives-on-plurality
WCC	Ecumenical considera-tions for dialogue and relations with people of other religions	2004	EN	http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/docu ments/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/ecumenical-considerations-for-dialogue-and-relations-with-people-of-other-religions
WCC	Religious plurality and Christian self-understanding Religiöse Pluralität und Christliches Selbstverständnis Identité chrétienne et pluralité religieuse	2006	EN DE FR	http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/docu ments/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/religious-plurality-and-christian-self-understanding http://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/docu ments/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/religious-plurality-and-christian-self-understanding?set_language=de http://www.oikoumene.org/fr/resources/docum ents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-

				documents/religious-plurality-and-christian-self-understanding?set_language=fr
WCC	Learning to Explore Love Together Gemeinsam das Verständnis der Liebe erschließen - ein Lernprozess Apprendre ensemble à explorer l'amour	2008	EN DE FR	http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/learning-to-explore-love-together?set_language=en http://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/learning-to-explore-love-together?set_language=de http://www.oikoumene.org/fr/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/learning-to-explore-love-together?set_language=fr
WCC/ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue/ WEA	Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World Das christliche Zeugnis in einer multireligiösen Welt Le témoignage chrétien dans un monde multireligieux	2011	EN DE FR	http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world http://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world?set_language=de http://www.oikoumene.org/fr/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world?set_language=fr

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Appendix 2: Participants in the study group

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4 **Start- and Draftingteam**

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8 Prof. Dr. Anne Hege Grung, Oslo

9 Dr. Simone Sinn, Genf

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2   CPCE Study-Secretary: Prof. Dr. Martin Friedrich, Vienna

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4   **Participants Consultation Arnoldshain September 2015**

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8   Dr. Szilveszter Füsti-Molnár (Reformierte Kirche in Ungarn)

9   Prof. Dr. Hans-Peter Großhans (Evangelische Kirche von Westfalen)

10   Prof. Dr. Anne Hege Grung (Norwegische Kirche)

11   Detlef Knoche (Evangelische Kirche in Hessen und Nassau)

12   Dr. Ireneusz Lukas (Lutherische Kirche in Polen)

13   Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Reinbold (Evangelisch-lutherische Kirche Landeskirche Hannovers)

14   Peter Lööv Roos (Schwedische Kirche)

15   Dr. Simone Sinn, Genf

16   Prof. Dr. Christof Voigt (United Methodist Church)

17   Dr. Anne-Laure Zwilling, Straßburg

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