

Engaging for Just and Participatory Societies. Belongingness in Judaism, Christianity and Islam

CAS Interreligious Studies 2019 at the Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland

“Belongingness” was at the heart of our study together in the CAS Interreligious Studies at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, from 1 to 19 July 2019. We young people came together from different parts of the world and from different religious communities. We are citizens of countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe, the Middle East and North America. We belong to Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious communities. We have sought both to build an interfaith community together and also to deepen our knowledge and awareness on creating just and participatory societies as one of the most pressing concerns of our time.

In a media-driven age quick to polarize based on “otherness”, we realize the pressing need to let religious groups speak for themselves in an effort to eliminate prejudice on both a global and local level. Encountering one another in relationship is the first step in reducing the “us” versus “them” dichotomy much of the world is acting in. Through our personal encounters we build interreligious networks that are able to inspire one another to good works and engagement with civil society as fellow faith actors in the global community, not enemies. Over the last three weeks, we engaged one another through the sacred Scriptures of the three Abrahamic faiths in order to exemplify, not only disagreeing in a way that does not separate, but also harmonizing the call of God to have the common good take precedence over our particularities.

As Jews, we find a clear definition of what it is to be human in the Hebrew Bible in Genesis 1:27, “And God created humanity in God’s image; in the image of God, God created them; male and female God created them.” There are no exceptions in this verse on the basis of creed, religion, race, gender, age, or ability. All of humanity is in the image of God, both individually and collectively. It is our obligation to follow the directive of Leviticus 19:18 and love all of our fellow humans as we love ourselves.

As Christians we affirm and pursue the calling to encounter our neighbor as the face of Christ in our world, and intrinsically worthy of our unconditional love as fellow bearers of God’s image. Our continued dialogue and joint endeavors across religious divides continue to be a way we construct just and participatory societies as we yearn for God’s will to be realized “on earth as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10)

As Muslims, who devote to the Divine Unity, we believe that diversity is a Will of God. In the Qur’an, it is mentioned that “if God willed, He would have made you one nation [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To Allah is your return all together and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ” (Al-Ma’idah 5/44). However, the diversity is not only a test but also a source of knowledge given by God for us to learn from each other. In the end, all human beings belong to the same origin, whatever the differences they might have: “O mankind,

indeed we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.” (Al-Hujuraat 49/13).

Implementing what we learned here entails understanding and respecting the differences of our neighbors of other faiths as we return our own communities and find meaningful ways to invite them into engaging with grassroot initiatives. Regardless of the form our endeavors take, we are united in our affirmation of the centrality of human dignity, establishing that both our similarities and our differences are points of celebration.