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Taken from :

'Mission in Dialogue. Essays in Honour of Michael L. Fitzgerald.

Edited by Catarina BELO and Jean-Jacques PÉRENNÈS.

Louvain / Paris: Éditions Peeters, 2012, Pp. 223-234.

Theologisches Forum Christentum-Islam: Its Significance for the Development of the 'Dialogue of Theological Exchange' and for Christian-Islamic Studies

1. Dialogue of Theological Exchange

'Dialogue and Proclamation', the joint document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for Evangelisation of Peoples, dated May 19, 1991, enumerates four 'forms of dialogue'.¹ In the third of these, 'the dialogue of theological exchange', the joint document explains, 'Specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's religious values'.² However, whereas such theological exchange had been organised

¹ Francesco Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), pp. 608-42. This joint document refers to the document, 'The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions: Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission' which was published on May 10, 1984 by the then 'Secretariat for Non-Christians' (see Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, pp. 566-79).

² Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, p. 623. The document 'The Attitude of the Church . . .' of 1984 (see fn. 1) had spoken of 'the dialogue of experts', whereas the 1991 document explicitly qualifies this dialogue as one of 'theological exchange'. It also makes clear that the 1984 document 'spoke of four forms, without claiming to establish among them (that is, the four different forms) any order of priority'

quite frequently by Christians and Muslims, from the time of Vatican II onwards, we find relatively few regular publications of on-going theological dialogues that truly enable the reader to participate in them as a process.

An outstanding example is the project of the French-language GRIC (*Groupe de recherche islamo-chrétien*), founded in 1977. It maintains local groups in Paris, Barcelona, Rabat, Tunis and Beirut and allows for the exchange of Christian and Muslim perspectives from Europe, North Africa and the Arab Near East.³

Members of GRIC are both Christian and Muslim scholars who, without a mandate from their respective faith community, walk an exemplary path of shared dialogue work. At each of the annual general meetings of all GRIC members there takes place an exchange about what the local groups have elaborated regarding previously determined themes. In this way, as a result of long processes, a number of books were generated. Their aim and specific purpose was to enable Christians and Muslims to speak in these texts with one voice, while mentioning points of disagreement repeatedly in the same texts.⁴

Since 1977 the theology faculty of the Divine Word Missionaries in Vienna/Mödling has been organising Christian-Muslim conferences, from which have emerged numerous literary publications. These are outstanding documentary accounts of dialogue, as they not only contain the papers given at the conferences but also reproduce all the discussions, structuring and indexing them with the help of glosses in the margins. A number of these volumes have been published in languages other than German, such as English, Arabic, Farsi and Urdu. A hallmark of the Vienna project is that, from the start, traditional Muslim theologians were invited to take an active part. The advantage of proceeding in this way is obvious. However, it incurred the risk, as Hansjörg Schmid rightly remarks, of lacking 'a protected space

and it stresses 'the interdependence of the various forms of dialogue', in other words, the fact that 'the different forms are interconnected' (ibid., pp. 622-33.) In the elaboration of both the 1984 and the 1991 document, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald played an important role.

³ See www.gric.fr.st/.

⁴ Hansjörg Schmid, 'Theologische Fragen im christlich-islamischen Verhältnis. Eine aktuelle Standortbestimmung', *Theologische Revue* (Münster), 103 (2007): pp.102-3.

of debate'. Thus, not surprisingly, responses were often crafted for public consumption, particularly those produced by Iranian participants.⁵

Ever since 2002, at the initiative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, an annual conference with Christian and Muslim scholars has taken place at different places around the world under the title 'Building Bridges'. Nine seminars, each lasting three days, have explored a number of the most significant themes in the interface between Islam and Christianity, such as: scripture; prophecy; the common good; justice and rights; human nature; interpretation; science and religion; tradition and modernity. Proceedings of the first five seminars have already been published and others are in production.⁶ In these volumes the editor assumes a central role. He introduces the whole volume and its different sections and also formulates the general conclusion. Muslims are not yet really full participants in these editorial functions. Also, in some cases it is not easy to detect whether it is the author or the editor whose voice is being relayed. The hallmark of the project is that texts from the Christian and Islamic traditions are used as the basis for discussion in a programme that includes public lectures and private sessions and deals not only with theological questions but also with a wide range of socially relevant issues.

A further project merits mention here, the Catholic-Shi'a Dialogue which, since 2003, has been established between Ampleforth Abbey (York, England), Heythrop College's Centre for Christianity and Inter-religious Dialogue (University of London), and the Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute (Qom, Iran). This project is defined as specifically Catholic-Shi'a and has a less official character than the Austrian initiative. A number of exchange visits between these Institutes in 2003 led to the first of what would be three conferences, the proceedings of which were published in three volumes. For the moment the project has fallen into abeyance, but Anthony O'Mahony of Heythrop College, the main initiator of the project on the Catholic side, is convinced that 'the Catholic-Shi'a Dialogue will resume in due course'.⁷ The initiators of the project aim at drawing 'upon the deep reservoir of shared Catholic and Shi'a spiritual resources, so as to engage with the world and to challenge our

⁵ Cf. Schmid, *ibid.*, p. 105; for his presentation of the whole project see *ibid.*, pp. 104-6.

⁶ http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/networks/building_bridges

⁷ A. O'Mahony in a personal letter to the author, dated 17 January 2011.

contemporary culture and society'.⁸ The key Shi'a representative, M. Shomali, who is now responsible for the training of all the Shi'a clerics from Iran who are to be posted, or are already posted, outside Iran, desires to re-issue all three volumes for the purposes of the above-mentioned training process.⁹ The publications of this project to date present the contributions to the respective conferences. They do not readily enable the reader, however, to understand the course of the discussions that took place at the conferences.¹⁰

2. Birth and Early Development of *Theologisches Forum Christentum-Islam*¹¹

2.1 The Context¹²

Political events were primarily responsible for the heightened interest in Islam during the two or three decades previous to the founding of the Stuttgart Forum in 2002. The Iranian revolution of 1979, the end of the East-West conflict, the Gulf War and, of course, the events of 9/11 dramatically reinforced developments that were already underway years before. There ensued in Europe a mushrooming of initiatives in Christian-Muslim dialogue. In these dialogue initiatives, however, the difference between 'political', intercultural and interreligious Christian-Muslim dialogue in most cases was not sufficiently taken into account. In fact, the debate on the social and

⁸ Anthony O'Mahony, Wulstan Peterburs and Mohammad Ali Shomali (eds.), *Catholics and Shi'a in Dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spirituality*, London: Melisende, 2004, p. 19.

⁹ Cf. A. O'Mahoney, letter to the author, dated 17 January 2011.

¹⁰ Schmid, *Theologische Fragen*, p. 108.

¹¹ Throughout this essay the short form Forum shall be used to indicate 'Das Theologische Forum Christentum—Islam'.

¹² Hansjörg Schmid, who together with Jutta Sperber and Andreas Renz initiated the Forum, from the first conference (14-16 March 2003) analysed the context, explained the rationale for the founding of the Forum and laid out its guiding ideas. 'Das "Theologische Forum Christentum—Islam": Kontexte, Anliegen, Ideen', in: Hansjörg Schmid / Andreas Renz / Jutta Sperber (hrsg.), *Herausforderung Islam. Anfragen an das christliche Selbstverständnis* [Challenge Islam: Questions to Christian Self-understanding]. Stuttgart: Akademie der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart, 2003, pp. 9-24. Our presentation here follows to a large extent this clear and well-documented essay. It has been one of the significant features of the Forum that, right from the beginning, structures of further development and content of the conferences were constantly monitored by Schmid and a growing team and network of experts around him.

cultural integration of Muslim immigrants, especially those who migrate from traditional Muslim communities, began to dominate public life and the media. Furthermore, by the late 1990s, people had started to dismiss dialogue with Muslims as 'naïve', at times even dangerously so. Supporters of this line would argue that a distinctly Western or Christian point of view was under-represented in Christian-Muslim exchanges, often marginalised for reasons of political correctness. The Muslim partners in dialogue, it was argued, were not challenged sufficiently by critical questions and analysis. By 2000, a situation had developed that caused Hansjörg Schmid to remark: 'It is not clear, how, with whom and about which themes dialogues are to be organised. No one knows whether the criticism of dialogue will lead to a retreat from dialogue or rather to putting dialogue on a more critical and solid foundation'.¹³

In the German context, the founding in January 2003 of the 'Koordinierungsrat der Vereinigungen des christlich-islamischen Dialoges in Deutschland' (KCID) [Coordinating Council of Organisations for Christian-Islamic Dialogue in Germany] which grew out of a long-standing cooperation between different 'Christlich-Muslimische Gesellschaften', was a significant step forward. The main intention of the founders of KCID, no doubt, was to give Christian-Muslim dialogue activities more influence in the political arena and in the media. At the same time, the need was felt to foster the religious and spiritual development of the encounter.

Many difficulties had to be faced and dealt with. Firstly, there were few Muslim partners in dialogue who combined scholarly qualification in the study of Islam as a religion with proficiency in the German language and at least a rudimentary acquaintance with the history of Christian and European thought. Public discussions were dominated by practical questions of 'integration', which concerned, for instance, the teaching of Islam in state schools, the construction of purpose-built mosques and the wearing of the headscarf in state-owned institutions. Also, the discourse of most mosque organisations still remained rather dominated by issues imported from the respective countries of origin.

Yet, as early as 2002, it was clear that the task which Christians and Muslims shared in shaping social life would highlight questions of religion and ideology. This, in turn, would call for scholarly reflection and research. Thus, it was becoming clear that at the top of the agenda was the question of the introduction of the teaching of

¹³ Schmid, *Herausforderung*, p. 11.

Islam in state schools and the consequent need for new university courses to train those teachers. Among the new generation of German Muslims there was certainly no dearth of intellectually and academically qualified persons. Schmid commented in 2003: 'It is not clear what role the organisations, which after all originated in the situation dominated by immigration issues, will play in the future'.¹⁴

On the Christian side, there was an awakening of the churches to the presence of Islam evidenced by the work of qualified persons (so-called *Dialogreferenten und -referentinnen*) in most 'Evangelische Landeskirchen' and Catholic dioceses who had been appointed to promote and supervise interreligious dialogue among the faithful, organise dialogue meetings and train facilitators. In addition, many people were reflecting regularly about interreligious dialogue. A number of informative and analytical church documents, which dealt with the issues of interreligious dialogue from the Christian perspective, were published and discussed widely.

Aware of all these developments, the initiators of the Forum noticed that academic theology had contributed remarkably little to solving the problems posed by the massive immigration of Muslims into Europe. Few students of theology had undertaken a serious study of Islam. In spite of an interest in the study of Islam from a sociological point of view among younger scholars, theologians remained preoccupied with specifically Christian topics and concerns. As Schmid commented in 2003: 'Theological formation, taken as a whole, is still far from providing a sufficient measure of interreligious competence'.¹⁵ Why does theology, faced with the presence of Islam in Europe, he asked, not seize the opportunity to articulate a Christian response to pressing social and political issues? It seemed to Schmid that since the training of theologians today does not engage them in a serious theological reflection regarding the Christian encounter with Islam, these same students do not develop an interest or a willingness to engage in pastoral contacts with Muslims. Competence to engage in discussions with Islam would develop only when the study of Islam has become more integrated into the study of Christian theology. Hence it was becoming clear that, in addition to strenuous political efforts to bring about integration at the grassroots level, scholarly work relating to the foundations of the Christian-Muslim relationship was much needed.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 12.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

2.2 The founding of the 'Forum'

Thus the idea of 'Theologisches Forum Christentum-Islam' was born. In 2002, its founders, Hansjörg Schmid (Catholic), Jutta Sperber (Protestant) and Andreas Renz (Catholic), said that the main objective of the Forum would be theological exchange and discussions among Christians and Muslims. From the outset the founders were convinced that the Forum had to be an ecumenical initiative, since, in their view, Muslims normally perceive Christians from different denominations as part of one single group of Christians. In addition, the ecumenical composition of the Forum would obviously enrich the thinking of its members as well as widen the network.¹⁶

The Forum understands itself explicitly as *theological*. Its declared aim is to strengthen the theological dimension of Christian-Muslim dialogue. From the beginning, two main reasons were given for this option: on the one hand, the fact that the theological aspect of Islam is often neglected; on the other, the conviction that neglecting the religious dimension of Muslim identity, instead of facilitating their integration, makes it more difficult if not impossible. The question of how Islam positions itself in state and society has a theological foundation, theology here being understood in a broad sense, not as a primarily inner-directed, but rather as an open discipline, closely connected to other fields and, especially, with Christian-Muslim studies.¹⁷

By using the term 'Forum', the founders were referring to the way the discussions and conferences would be conducted. Their aim was to involve not only individuals but groups and small networks of scholars, many of whom turned out to be young scholars, as the founders had hoped. These specific emphases would seem to be necessary in a field where promising academics would play a decisive role in the near future. Only such an open approach to discussions and structures would enable the Forum both to broaden discourse about Islam and to engage on a deeper level with Muslims. The contributions of the participants and the actual process of discussions during and after the conferences are all of great importance. The significance of this process is highlighted by the publications brought out by the Forum. It is open to the possibility of including spontaneous, undeveloped and even offensive

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁷ Ibid.

ideas into the process as well. In other words, the constitution of a discussion circle that meets regularly and to which Christian and Muslim scholars increasingly belong in equal numbers has contributed decisively to raising the quality of the discussions. The main characteristics of the Forum are regularity and innovation. Its emphasis on networking enables its members to contact and to support one another.

3. The Subsequent Development of the Project

3.1 The First Phase

The first step and the thematic point of departure was taken in 2002 when Jutta Sperber, Andreas Renz and Hansjörg Schmid organised a conference to be held in March 2003 in which twenty-five Christian theologians participated. Controversially, they discussed topics such as the theological relationship between the Islamic and the Christian faiths, and methods for promoting mutual theological understanding of the central phenomena and teachings of one religion by theologians of the other. They also debated the value and need for a critical theological assessment of teachings of each religion by scholars of the other. For example, does a critical theological assessment, a 'discernment of spirits', applied to comparative theology, make any sense or is such a normative approach alien to the shared study of both traditions? An analogous discussion developed during the second conference in 2004, which was attended by forty Christian scholars of religion and by theologians with a deep interest in dialogue with Islam. The fact that a great number of young scholars from different academic disciplines participated in that second annual conference indicated that the objective of bringing together a wide variety of experience and knowledge had been achieved. Whereas Stefan Schreiner stressed the distinctive features of the Qur'anic and Biblical ideas of the human person (*Menschenbild*) and that both these conceptions of the human person should be allowed to exist together, Claude Gilliot stressed the need to make a clear distinction between the basic concepts and theologies of both religions. Since, for instance, Gilliot argued that salvation according to Islamic faith was not a reality that develops historically, it would be more proper to speak of a 'history of guidance and of going astray' rather than of an Islamic salvation history. Again, instead of speaking of 'hereditary sin' (German: *Erbsünde*),

one should speak (rather) of original sin (German: *Ursünde*). In the light of the diversity of theological concepts and traditions, even within individual Christian groups, it was considered unrealistic to aim at consensus about one shared position. Instead, it was judged more meaningful to achieve greater clarification of concepts which are theologically disputed.

3.2 The Second Phase

During the first phase of its activity, the Forum had begun to make contacts with Muslim scholars living in German-speaking countries, especially those of the younger generation. Thus, in March 2005, the first annual conference, which included Muslim participants and speakers took place on the theme: 'In the name of God . . . Theology, Anthropology and the Practice of Prayer in Christianity and Islam'. This topic was well-suited to lead into the second phase of the project. On the one hand, the Muslim speakers, in contrast to the Christians, did not identify a 'crisis of prayer' in the context of modern life. Christians, on the other hand, were challenged to explain that prayer addressed to Christ, as distinct from prayer addressed to the Father, for instance, does not run counter to the profession of Qur'anic monotheism.

In the course of this and the subsequent conferences (see the list of conferences and their publications below), it became clear that the term 'dialogue' describes only a part of the rich reality which the structured process of the Forum and its various activities represent. The members of the Forum have increasingly come to see clearly that they are in fact involved in a process of developing a new and meaningful way of practicing Christian-Muslim studies. Essential elements of these, ideally speaking, would be: self-criticism; the effort of studying a religious phenomenon or movement from a multiplicity of perspectives; adopting critical hermeneutics; and finally, readiness to learn inter-religiously. All these elements, in fact, have increasingly characterised the meetings and their discussions. There remains a certain asymmetry: whereas, relatively speaking, almost all the Christian participants have taken the trouble to study Islam, many under the guidance of Muslim scholars, including the primary sources and the formative figures? of that religion, Muslims have rarely undertaken an intensive study of the formative sources and figures of Christianity, let alone under the supervision of Christian scholars.

Beyond the primary objective of a deeper understanding of one another by listening and responding on a scholarly level, the further aim of the Forum was to initiate dialogue activities. Here, a special effort was made to reach out to the younger generation of German-speaking Muslims and Christians who were still in the process of writing their M.Phil or Ph.D. theses. Less than ten years after the founding of the Forum, as a result of the introduction of the teaching of Islam in state schools and the establishing of university institutes of Islamic theology, qualified partners in theological dialogue have become more readily available, and this trend is rapidly growing. These developments provide a new impetus for the whole venture.

The Forum encourages not only theologians of both religions, but also scholars and advanced students of related disciplines to take part. In addition, those who could help to implement certain key conclusions were also invited to attend. Thus, the participants in the Forum could be described as follows:

- Theologians with a focus on Christian-Muslim dialogue and its themes, including doctoral students and those preparing a postdoctoral thesis required for qualification to teach in a university, and lecturers and professors who study Islam and its relevance for Christian theology or who study Christianity and its relevance for Islam in the context of a secular and pluralistic democracy.
- Christians and Muslims who work in the field of adult education and in different pastoral services with a focus on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations and who are interested in a scholarly reflection on their work.
- Other scholars working in social and cultural disciplines—for instance, scholars in the field of religious studies, scholars of law, and sociologists who focus on Islam and Christian-Muslim relations and are keen to widen their own perspective by exposing it to an interdisciplinary discourse.

3.3 Conferences of *Theologisches Forum Christentum-Islam*: Publications and participants to date

3.3.1. 14-16 March 2003, Stuttgart-Hohenheim

Was bedeuten Existenz und Anspruch des Islam für das Selbstverständnis christlichen Glaubens?

[What Do the Existence and the Claims of Islam Mean for the Self-understanding of the Christian Faith?]

Published:

Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz and Jutta Sperber, eds. *Herausforderung Islam. Anfragen an das christliche Selbstverständnis*. Stuttgart: Akademie der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart, 2003.

3.3.2. 5–7 March 2004, Stuttgart-Hohenheim

Erlösung oder Rechtleitung? Das Heilsverständnis als Ausdruck des Gott-Mensch-Verhältnisses in Christentum und Islam

[Redemption or Guidance? The Understanding of Salvation as an Expression of the Relationship between God and Man in Christianity and Islam]

Published:

Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz und Jutta Sperber, eds. *Heil in Christentum und Islam. Erlösung oder Rechtleitung?* Stuttgart: Akademie der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart, 2004.

3.3.3. 4–6 March 2005, Stuttgart-Hohenheim

‘Im Namen Gottes . . .’: Theologie und Praxis des Gebets in Christentum und Islam.

[‘In the Name of God . . .’: The Theology and Practice of Prayer in Christianity and Islam]

Published:

Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz und Jutta Sperber, eds. *‘Im Namen Gottes . . .’: Theologie und Praxis des Gebets in Christentum und Islam*. Regensburg: Pustet, 2006.

3.3.4 3–5 March 2006, Stuttgart-Hohenheim

Identität durch Differenz? Zur Rolle der wechselseitigen Abgrenzungen in Christentum und Islam

[Identity and Difference: On the Role of Mutual Delimitations in Christianity and Islam]

Published:

Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz, Jutta Sperber und Duran Terzi, eds. *Identität durch Differenz? Wechselseitige Abgrenzungen in Christentum und Islam*. Regensburg: Pustet, 2007.

3.3.5 2–4 March 2007, Stuttgart-Hohenheim

Strafe, Prüfung oder Preis der Freiheit? Christliche und islamische Deutungen menschlichen Leidens

[Punishment, Trial or the Price of Freedom? Christian and Islamic Interpretations of Human Suffering]

Published:

Andreas Renz, Hansjörg Schmid, Jutta Sperber und Abdullah Takim, eds. *Prüfung oder Preis der Freiheit? Leid und Leidbewältigung in Christentum und Islam*. Regensburg: Pustet, 2008.

3.3.6 29 February–3 March 2008, Stuttgart-Hohenheim

Verantwortung für das Leben. Ethik in Christentum und Islam

[Responsibility for Life: Ethics in Christianity and Islam]

Published:

Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz, Abdullah Takim und Bülent Ucar, eds. *Verantwortung für das Leben. Ethik in Christentum und Islam*. Regensburg: Pustet, 2008.

3.3.7 6–8 March, 2009, Stuttgart-Hohenheim

‘Nahe ist dir das Wort . . .’: Schriftauslegung in Christentum und Islam

[‘The Word is Near to You . . .’: Scriptural Exegesis in Christianity and Islam]

Published:

Hansjörg Schmid, Andreas Renz, Bülent Uçar, eds. *'Nahe ist dir das Wort...': Schriftauslegung in Christentum und Islam*. Regensburg: Pustet 2010.

3.3.8 5–7 March 2010, Stuttgart-Hohenheim

Zeugnis, Einladung, Bekehrung. Mission in Christentum und Islam
[Witness, Invitation, Conversion: Mission in Christianity and Islam]

Published:

Hansjörg Schmid, Ayşe Başol-Gürdal, Anja Middelbeck-Varwick, Bülent Ucar, eds. *Zeugnis, Einladung, Bekehrung. Mission in Christentum und Islam*. Regensburg: Pustet, 2011.

3.3.9 4–6 March 2011, Stuttgart-Hohenheim

'Der stets größere Gott'. Gottesvorstellungen in Christentum und Islam
['The Ever Greater God': Concepts of God in Christianity and Islam]

Not yet published

As the following figures demonstrate, the overall number of participants as well as the percentage of Muslim participation in the different sessions of the Forum has gradually increased.

Year	Total participants	Muslims	Percentage of Muslim participants
2005	53	7	13.2
2006	98	21	23.6
2007	95	26	27.4
2008	108	45	41.7
2009	123	51	41.5
2010	139	62	44.6

4. Concluding Remarks

As stated at the beginning of this essay, the Forum is not the first initiative of this kind, but it was able to build upon the experiences and results of other similar initiatives. What, then, is special about the Forum? Its special characteristic is that it mirrors and at the same time responds creatively to the new situation of Christian-Muslim study and dialogue in many countries of Europe as well as in the United States of America, Canada and Australia. In all these countries during the last two or three decades, a generation of young Muslims has grown up and been educated in schools and universities, together with their non-Muslim compatriots. Some of these young Muslims have developed a keen interest in deepening knowledge of their religion by the academic study of Islam in order to serve their communities in the fields of religious preaching, theological research, religious education of children, youth and adults and in various pastoral services in prisons, hospitals and the army. Studying Islam for these purposes in a 'Western' environment and according to the standards and methods of the modern human sciences, they encounter young Christians with similar interests and with a similar professional outlook. In this context, these Muslims and Christians are able to share with one another, through study and dialogue, the ways in which their respective traditions deal with key issues of monotheistic faith and theology. It seems that the founders of the Forum have responded to this need in a sensitive and intelligent way by providing a platform for a sharing of struggles and aspirations.

To guarantee the continued success of this significant initiative, the following points should be kept in mind. Above all, the Forum must not yield to the temptation to abandon, however gradually or subtly, its distinctly theological character. Christian and Muslim theologies worthy of their name reflect critically upon the faith, the religious heritage and the living identity of their respective faith communities. In consequence, the Forum, it seems to me, must by all means avoid falling into the following two temptations: adopting the relativistic position of the so-called 'pluralistic theology of religions' on the one hand, and on the other, slipping from theological reflection into 'religious studies', which, by definition, is an approach which does not go beyond the descriptive method of phenomenology. The Forum, instead, should continue to take seriously the distinct identities and truth claims of Muslims and Christians and the various communities from which they come. In their shared study of the founda-

tional scriptures, the Forum should search for a new hermeneutical approach but must not fall into the trap of replacing, as it were, the old texts with new ones. As to the choice of participants, the Forum would be well advised to maintain a balance between the number of younger scholars and the number of distinguished scholars belonging to the older generation. For the sake of facilitating depth as well as ease of communication, the Forum would seem to be well advised to continue functioning in the German language. However, the fact that the Christian and Muslim participants share the academic tradition of religious study of the German-speaking countries is beneficial only if it allows itself continuously to be enriched by other traditions of religious scholarship from East and West. Finally, by publishing at least selections of the papers and discussions of the annual conferences in other languages (e.g., English, Arabic, Turkish), the Forum would make a significant contribution to the development of meaningful Christian-Muslim theological studies throughout the world.