

Dirasat June 4 – 6, 2009

A short Narrative report:

***'Love thy neighbor as thyself' :  
Who is the neighbor and what is the relation to the other ?***

***Weekend seminar for study and discussion, intended for teachers  
of Jewish, Christian and Muslim seminaries of religious  
instruction and education***

One long weekend in June constituted the opening of a new program based on seminars that we have conducted and methodologies that we have developed during the past two years in Doumia ~ Sakinah, The Pluralistic Spiritual Center in Wahat al-Salam ~ Neve Shalom.

The target population of the program was students of Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious teaching seminaries, from different streams and denominations of the three religions. In the meetings, textual and other materials were presented that stimulated theological and political discussion.

The very act of conducting such a weekend seminar created a special challenge. Some of the participants came with their family members with the hope of celebrating the Jewish sabbath or Muslim Friday prayers together.

The encounter and the discussions opened before the participants a window of acquaintance with and understanding of each others' religious worlds. In this way it enabled them to develop a more pluralistic perspective. The intended result was to create an atmosphere of openness and interest among the staff, to consider the presentation of inter-religious subject matter in their institutions and establish contacts between the seminaries.

Starting from religious resources, the program aims to motivate teachers and clergy to develop a language of dialogue and new tools, in order to build agreements and a shared life that is based on equality, justice, reconciliation and peace.

In keeping with our educational approach, we chose to hold the meeting (as well as future meetings in the program) in both Arabic and Hebrew. The participants were able to express themselves in their own language and were translated. All the texts were prepared ahead of time and presented in both languages.

The June weekend was planned in a number of meetings that were held in Jerusalem with representatives of key institutions participating in the program. The broad topic that we chose to deal with was: the relationship with the “other”

in each religion. The representatives of the colleges that participated in the planning were requested to prepare texts, each from their own religion, to present the subject and open it to discussion. The other participants were requested to lead prayers and prepare a sermon. The steering committee included Abdessalam Najjar and Dorit Shippin from the Pluralistic Spiritual Center of Wahat al-Salam ~ Neve Shalom (WAS-NS); Ron Kronish and Ofir Yarden, from the Israel Inter-religious Council; Rabbi Prof. Yehodaya Amir from Hebrew Union College; Rev. Dr. Jamal Khader from the Latin Patriarch Seminary in Beit Jalla; Dr. Ahmad Ghabin and Dr. Hanan Abu-Moch from Al-Qasemi College in Bakaa al-Gharbiah and Dr. Salim Munair from Bethlehem Bible College.

The participants: 20 in number arrived from various institutions, among them the Hebrew University, the Hartman Institute, the Mussalaha Organization, Hebrew Union College, Bethlehem University, the Latin Patriarch Seminary in Beit Jalla and the Al-Qasemi College in Bakaa Al-Gharbiya.

### ***The Program***

We conducted the program at Nes Amim Guest House in the Galilee, a place which symbolizes friendship between Christians and Jews and encourages inter-religious encounters. The house of prayer in Nes Amim, in which we conducted the meetings, was suitable for hosting a multi-religious group and constitutes a pleasant and inspirational place for a spiritual meeting.

The first evening was dedicated to making acquaintance and coordinating expectations. The following two days were divided into three segments. Each segment presented a text of one religion and included facilitated discussion in small groups and plenary sessions. At the end of the study and discussion of each religion, prayer was conducted, in the presence of members of the other religions, and a sermon was given.

Discussions took place in both languages and had a theological and political character. They focused on the influence of religious tradition on the political conflict; ways to make use of religious resources for the advancement of justice, reconciliation and peace in our region; the possibility of conducting a similar study program in each of the institutions; and the possibility of inter-institutional cooperation.

In the summary session, Rabbi Prof. Yehodaya Amir (a participant and member of the steering committee) said:

*A few years ago I was a guest at a Protestant church in Berlin. The Church had a glass wall, through which there was a view of the woods. The cross was not inside the church but placed outside, behind the glass wall. God is in the world - and not in any church. As human beings we*

*feel a need to come to church in order to overcome the conflicts we have in the world - conflicts which are expressed by a lack of understanding for one another, by hatred and by war.*

*And so we are here together, as teachers and educators, who can act, each in our community, to bring the voice of the “other” into our educational work. Being here together gives us the opportunity to learn how to feel better with one-another. Our more complex mission is to help students to explore bravely, in a critical and open way, the manner in which religion, culture and national conditioning influence our acceptance of the others”.*

*If we continue to work together as a group, we can rise to a higher level of self-exposure, theological thinking, and confrontation with questions of religion, politics and society: all on the basis of the process we have already begun. Personal acquaintance and relationships between each other and the institutions in which we are working, will come as a part of the process.*

### **Acknowledgments**

The seminar took place and was successful thanks to the generous support of the Niwano Foundation for Peace (Japan), and the Hessen Church in Germany.

Special thanks to our partners in the program: the Inter-religious Coordinating Committee for Israel (ICCI), Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish and Ofir Yarden, and to the other members of the steering committee: Rabbi Prof. Yehodaya Amir from the Rabbinical Training Center of Hebrew Union College; Rev. Dr. Jamal Khader from the Latin Patriarch Seminary in Beit Jalla and Bethlehem University; Dr. Ahmad Ghabin and Dr. Hanan Abu-Moch from Al-Qasemi Academic College of Education in Bakaa Al-Gharbiya; and to Dr. Salim Munair from Bethlehem Bible College.

Report by :

Dorit Shippin

Pluralistic Spiritual Center

Wahat Al salam~Neve Shalom