

Bible, Kor'an and suicide attacks.

A seminar on transforming images of the enemy.

The role of religion in situations of conflict is very much debated. Certain people legitimize the use of violence, including suicide bombing, based on texts from the Holy Scriptures. Others look to religion as a resource for peace-building. How should we read texts in the Bible and the Kor'an which speak of 'the others' as enemies? Is 'transforming reading' possible?

On 8 and 9 October 2009, the Hendrik Kraemer Institute (HKI) for missionary training of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, organized a seminar on this topic. Theologians and representatives of development organisations reflected on how this sensitive issue can be included in programs for peace and reconciliation.

Participants from different countries, Christians and Muslims, concluded that religious institutions and their leaders should reflect on how their religion contributes to the creation of images of 'the enemy'. Only then they will be able to 'deconstruct' those images in order to discover who is an 'other' and who or what is really an 'enemy'.

The seminar focussed on the context of the Netherlands and Pakistan.

Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali from Pakistan spoke about how historical developments in religious beliefs contribute to the transformation of 'the other' into 'the enemy'. This needs to be understood in order to deconstruct images of the enemy. Dr. Lucien van Liere (University of Utrecht) and Dr. Shanta Premawardhana (WCC) pointed at the role psychology and economy (Mammon) play.

Dr. Farooq Khan from Pakistan shared his involvement in a reintegration program for young people who were trained by Taliban to commit suicide bombing. How to re-educate them to come to a different understanding of Islam? Dr. Klaas Sponk of the Protestant Theological University in the Netherlands elaborated on Bible texts such as on Samson who took many people with him in his self chosen death.

Four examples of an encouraging role of religion were presented. A brand new documentary by a young Pakistani woman on young Muslims in the Netherlands after the murder of Theo van Gogh, inter-religious dialogue at grass roots level in Pakistan, community building in a deprived neighbourhood of Sao Paulo and the story of Dutch veterans who went back to Srebrenica. The presentations were all impressive.

And so were the results of the seminar, presented by participants in an inventory of useful theological and educational elements for training in transforming the image of the enemy.

The seminar is part of a programme of ICCO and Kerk in Actie in co-operation with the Protestant Theological University, University of Utrecht and WCC, co-ordinated by HKI

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