Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses

The Concept of Tolerance and the Concept of Peace in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

December 13–15, 2017

I. The Concept of Tolerance in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

1. The Concept of Tolerance in Judaism

(Prof. Dr. Michael Zank, Boston University)

In any discussion of tolerance in the context of Judaism, the historical experience of expulsion and exclusion of the Jewish people needs to be kept in mind. The concept of tolerance or toleration (in the sense of political forbearance of religious pluratity) came to Jews from outside, first from early Islam and then, in modern times, from Christianity. Prof. Zank gave a historical overview of the concept of toleration in relation to Judaism, mentioning particularly Locke's *Letters on Toleration*, in which the concept was defined as lack of state persecution, the "Jew Bill" passed by the Maryland General Assembly in 1826, the 1782 "Toleranzpatent" settling the status of the Jews in the Habsburg territories, and the emancipation of Jews across Europe in the 19th century. The last-mentioned was met with severe resistance but also with an extension of the idea to the rights of minorities in general. Tolerance has sometimes been criticised as a slippery slope leading to a levelling of identities. In this context, Jews have historically been attacked from both the political left and right, the former because of their tendency to prefer toleration as a collective to individual integration, the latter because their toleration was seen as incompatible with a Christian state.

Some questions to be answered in discussing the concept of tolerance in Jewish thought include: Whether tolerance is seen as a legal and collective or an individual and private phenomenon, whether Jews in antiquity were confronted with equivalent concepts despite the word being a modern invention, whether tolerance of different rites within Judaism is included in the discussion and what the limits of toleration are. To answer the second of these questions, a starting point is to examine the religious scriptures for examples of what would in modern language be termed tolerance or intolerance. The Biblical story of Pinhas (Num 25) might be discussed as an example of religious intolerance. On the other hand, expressions of tolerance might be found in the commandment to include strangers in society, although that could also be seen as an imposition of legal conformity on strangers. The so-called "Mosaic

distinction", which introduced the notion of truth or falsehood to religion, established at least a certain exclusivity, a concept whose relation to intolerance remains to be explored.

In early Rabbinic Judaism, a depoliticization of Judaism can be observed, where great tolerance is expressed in answering the question of who is seen as part of the people of Israel, at least as far as life in this world is concerned. Some Jewish philosophers, most notably Moses Maimonides, posited a kind of intellectual aristocracy across the boundaries of faith communities and insisted that the truth is to be accepted wherever it is found. Jewish mystics sometimes saw the Jewish people as ontologically superior to others within the cosmos. There is also disagreement on how strongly Jews are obliged to bring those of Jewish extraction who do not practice Jewish law back to practicing the Halakhah or how much tolerance should be extended to non-observing Jews.

In the discussion, the question of religious persecution of minorites at the hands of Jews was raised. Historically, the Jews are an exceptional case with regard to religious prosecution as they have rarely been in a position of political power. One exception is ancient South Arabia, where the Christian minority was treated harshly. The idea of the Jews as God's Chosen People was mentioned as a possible sign of intolerance, but can also be understood mainly as a special obligation that the Jews carry (unlike the rest of humanity, who only need to follow the Noahide laws as opposed to the stricter Mosaic ones), thus expressing a functional, rather than a substantive exceptionalism. A distinction must be made between particularism and intolerance. As a possible example of tolerance in the Hebrew Bible, the universalistic tendencies of Isaiah can be named. For example the image of a "house of prayer for all nations" (Is 56:7) is sometimes understood as allowing each nation to pray in their own way.

2. The Concept of Tolerance in Christianity
(Prof. Dr. Christian Polke, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen)

The concept of tolerance can either be understood as a theoretical idea or a practical virtue. Historically, the first groups in Europe that had to be tolerated were dissenters within Christianity. The idea of religious tolerance arose along with that of religious freedom in early modern times. The religious wars of the 16th century then produced a divided continent with internally homogeneous territories due to the principle of *cujus regio ejus religio*, ironically leaving *less* room for those who dissented from *both* Catholicism and mainstream Protestantism.

Two central figures for the development of the concept of tolerance were Pierre Baille (1647-1706) and Roger Williams (d. 1683). The latter first introduced the idea of religious tolerance even towards atheists and pagans, while speaking out against the occupation of Native American lands. He regarded tolerance as mandatory in public life as peace cannot be guaranteed when imposing a single absolute truth regime on all of society. An equlibrium of truth and peace is possible only through the separation of church and state. The peace afforded by religious tolerance is also mandatory from a religious ethical point of view as this gives God time to reveal His peace to mankind.

Pierre Baille argued that as no ultimate truth can be reached in religious questions in this life, God has merely commanded the *search* for His truth. Each person must therefore be allowed freedom of conscience, even though that does not mean that every person's conscience leads them in the right direction. No religious group can be allowed to use force to compel others to follow their convictions, as otherwise any religious group, within their own framework of beliefs, could feel justified to use violence.

Many different conceptions of tolerance can be construed within a Christian framework, but all these conceptions must be lived out in moral habits, as tolerance is a virtue rather than a theoretical concept. The will to compromise as the basis of temporary results in conflicts is an element of the virtue of tolerance. The confession of sins, which is part of the liturgy, provides a ritual root of tolerance in that it shows the archetype of God's toleration of the sinner as well as guarding against a lack of humility, which is the basis of intolerance (see also Lk 18:19; Mt 7:3–5).

After the talk, the possibility of moving from the stage of mere tolerance to that of mutual acceptance as equals was briefly discussed from a Christian theological perspective. In this, it is important to make a distinction between respecting fellow humans as created in the image of God and tolerating their opinions, without necessarily having to accept these opinions. The elaboration of the concept of tolerance does not start from a theoretical concept which is then put into practice, but consists in acting out the virtue of tolerance and then reflecting on it and its manifestations. This process begins on the level of ritual, which fits in the the Orthodox tradition's undestanding of the Christian way of life as the "liturgy after the liturgy".

3. The Concept of Tolerance in Islam
(Prof. Dr. Anna Ayşe Akasoy, City University New York)

The explanation of tolerance is historically rooted in Europe and was not theorised in Islamic history. In modern times, the term *tasāmuḥ*, which carries notions of mutual generosity, is used. Where Qur'ānic exegesis is concerned, different exegetes tend to select different verses as pertinent to the topic and take them out of context, which leads to varying results. *Ḥadīṯ* reports are also very diverse, including both generous and violent treatment of religious others. Within Sunnī Islam, Islamic law regards disagreement within reasonable limits as permissible and even as a blessing, although the principle of consensus (*iǧmāʿ*) also plays a large role. Moreover, there is the principle of "commanding right and forbidding wrong", which creates an obligation to interfere that can be seen as intolerant. Both in Sufism and in Islamic philosophy, there are those who, in different ways, downplay differences between religions as these are seen as imperfect approximations of the truth. There is always some friction between two aspects of the law: the law as exempt from tolerance in that force can be used to uphold the law; and the law as the sphere in which tolerance is theorised and practised. Also worth mentioning is the concept of the "people of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*), which originally meant mainly Christians and Jews but was often pragmatically extended to encompass other religious groups, who were assigned a subordinate but protected status under Islamic rule. Historical examples of both tolerance and its opposite show that although the term is modern, tolerance as an attitude was well-established at various periods in history, and that violent precedent need not determine the future.

Considering this, it should also be noted that in Western Europe, the rise of the idea of religious tolerance did not mark the end of violence and thus its importance should not be overstated. Many existing surveys of the idea of tolerance in Islam are attempts to counteract prejudice against Islam as intolerant and violent and therefore tend to be skewed towards the image of Islam as especially tolerant. As Stephan Kokew notes, tolerance is a "Konfliktbegriff" (term of conflict). Tolerance is a solution, which means that its absence can either point to ongoing conflict or to the absence of a problem in the first place. One can also ask if there are hegemonic notions implied in the word "tolerance" (as opposed to *tasāmuḥ*, which has different connotations and etymologically implies reciprocity).

In the discussion, the issue of tolerance discourses being influenced be a "European hegemony" discourse was debated further. Inner-religious developments such as the

permission of *ikhtilāf* in Islamic law could be discussed more thoroughly in this context; moreover, the motivation of "pluralism management" can be seen as a bridging framework that is relevant in any cultural context. "Hegemony", however, can be understood not just as straightforward colonialism, but also as any construal of some group as "the other". It should also be kept in mind that societies tend to reduce and limit the range of accepted ideas regardless of outside influence over time, for example, Ṭabarī's early commentary on the Qur'ān discussed far more divergent interpretations than later commentaries did. The question of the concept of tolerance in Islam cannot be reduced to what the Qur'ān says about the topic. Rather, the role of historical conditions in the Qur'ānic formation and later developments of the concept must also be considered. Moreover, while these are adequate considerations from the point of view of a historian, they do not reflect the religious attitudes of many modern Muslims, which also should not be overlooked.

4. Concluding Discussion

Opening the concluding discussion of the papers, Prof. Isaacs expressed some severe criticisms of Prof. Zank's talk. One central question to ask is in what way Jewish practice turns one into a tolerant person, as the Hebrew word *sōḇlānūt* (tolerance) is not a Biblical concept, but a modern invention. Being tolerant does not, in practice, mean tolerating the intolerable, but becoming aware of the createdness of everything and acccepting it as originating in God. Accepting and loving humanity in this way can be challenging given the Jewish people's traumatic historical experience which any discussion of Judaism has to be sensitive to: All three central principles of Judaism, namely the oneness of God, the Jewish people as a collective, and their connection with the land of Israel, have been attacked numerous times throughout history. The evolution of Jewish thought cannot be divided into separate time periods if Jewish perception of history as one time capsule is taken into account. Another fundamental question in the context of tolerance and Judaism is how Jews view the monotheism of Christianity and Islam, as the oneness of God is the central principle which characterises Judaism as a religion. What it means to recognise another religion (rather than individuals) as fulfilling the Noahide laws remains to be explored.

Tolerance implies acceptance of others as they are but also the refusal to dilute differences. This means that exclusiveness should not be equated with intolerance, even though it does lead to a multiplicity of truth-related opinions. A further problem which was mentioned in the

discussion were texts from within the Jewish tradition that liken non-Jewish people to animals or describe them as less than human. However, what these texts actually imply is that all people without prophetic experience, including many Jews, are on the level of animals in their amount of spiritual awareness. More generally, which traditional texts are "problematic" depends on the current context and changes over time, but it is in the nature of religion that it cannot simply be adjusted to one's own time or point of view. The concept of chosenness, which plays a role both in Judaism and Christianity, should also be considered in connection with the concept of tolerance. Tolerance is also an internal issue whithin each religion, not just between different religions.

The presentation on tolerance in Christianity was criticised for being too one-sided. The projected article should also consider other theologies within Christianity. Also, the presentation was focused on a political conception of tolerance, whereas religious tolerance mainly has its place in a space "in between": it is neither an issue of the state nor of the private individual, but of societies and communities. Two senses of the term tolerance need to be distinguished: "tolerance" originally is a negative term, meaning merely to tolerate others without accepting them as equals or agreeing with them. However, modern documents such as the UNESCO's *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance* use the term positively in the sense of acceptance and appreciation. The practical implications of the concept of tolerance has also changed over time, as notions about who and what should be tolerated differ depending on the context.

The question of whether tolerance necessarily involves a relativization of truth claims, or whether a concept of religious tolerance can be worked out which allows a relation to absolute truth, was also discussed. The relation of tolerance to truth is problematic at first because truth is also a logical/scientific concept. In the areas of science and logic, truths are facts and deviations from them should not be tolerated in an educated discourse. However, truth in matters of religion or morality differs from mathematical or scientific truth in that it cannot be grasped and defined objectively, so that a variety of opinions about what the truth is must be accepted. Those glimpses of an absolute truth that humans can grasp are constantly shifting and eluding us, inviting an attitude of humility. The question to pursue is whether there is a way to free religion from he power structures that are held in place by violence or

enforced authority. Tolerance can be understood both as a personal virtue, linked with humility, and as a social virtue, connected to justice.

When discussing the concept of tolerance in Islam, there are some linguistic points to consider, as there are several different Arabic words that can be used for tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*, *tasāhul*, *ḥilm*, *luṭf*, etc.), each with different connotations, none of which is exactly equivalent to the English term "tolerance". Also, the historical context of the Qur'ān's origin is to be considered, as its plural context compelled a plural, "tolerant" formulation, although the exact connection between plurality and tolerance is hard to pin down. As the Qur'ānic speaker has a diverse audience, the speech itself differs throughout the period of revelation and the positions the text takes on other religions are also informed by specific situations, for instance, the Meccan *sūrahs* are more tolerant of other monotheistic religions than the Medinan ones. In this context, the question was raised whether there is a relationship between tolerance and paternalism, and whether, therefore, the change in tone between the Meccan and Medinan *sūrahs* is related to the Muslim community's rise to political power.

The references in the papers to tolerance as a hegemonic concept were not meant to portray tolerance as a purely imperialist concept, but to clarify that when tolerance is introduced as a modern concept, this puts Islam on the defensive. Rather, a truly universal conceptual core should be found and formulated, as versions of this core can be readily found in the Islamic tradition.

II. The Concept of Peace in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

1. The Concept of Peace in Judaism

(Alick Isaacs, Ph.D., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

As a religious Jewish person living in Israel and involved in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, one's religious identity is strained as a result of the religious identification with a community whose political project is very different. At the same time, there is a difference between the secular philosophy of peace manifested, for example, in the Oslo process, and a religious philosophy of peace, which raises the question of whether a religious person can think of the Oslo principles as peace at all. In the case of a dispute about ownership of a piece of cloth, as told in the Mishnah, cutting the cloth in half is a solution, but if the dispute is about a Torah scroll or, as in the story of Solomon and the two women, about a baby, this solution would be very destructive. The first question to answer, then, is whether peace involves division or demands wholeness because of the sanctity of the disputed object or space.

The central idea to address in this context is that of the unity of irreconcilable opposites (as expressed, for instance, in Isaiah 11:6: "The wolf will live with the lamb."), just as the oneness of God complements the multiplicity of creation instead of being opposed to it (cf. Ezekiel 37:15–28). This is central to the idea of peace in the Hebrew language, and also fundamentally opposed to any idea of peace that is based on common ground. Rather, it involves the constant, unresolved presence of opposites, a paradoxical assertion that carries a fundamentally prophetic character (cf. Talmud Bavli, Eruvin 13b). Because the one God is the creator of all opposites, even contradictory opposites are one for God (cf. Judah Loew b. Bezalel, *Derekh Hayyim*). Thus, the Jewish religious idea of peace involves the flourishing of variety in contradiction as a condition for understanding unity. On a practical level, this raises the question of whether the religious right in Israel should be converted to a secular concept that they do not believe in or rather convinced to translate their own concept of peace into a political reality.

This idea of the unity of opposites is, in a way, a far more radical idea than pluralism, as the peaceful unity of all things in this world includes all viewpoints, even non-peaceful ones, whereas pluralism excludes those groups which do not support pluralistic, tolerant principles. However, as secularism, pluralism and compromise also exist in this world, they too can be

included in this framework. For some groups, uncompromising totality is the only acceptable option deeply rooted in their worldview. This vision of peace is a challenge to accept even these groups, even when the totality that they demand is fundamentally irreconcilable with one's own, and is therefore radically accepting of otherness in a way that a pluralistic view based on compromise cannot.

Even though this paper was a theoretical analysis of the meaning of peace in Jewish thought, which is a theological concept rather than a political one, this idea cannot be detached from the current conflict. These ideas have been discussed in "anti-political" forums and actually facilitated discussions between right-wing rabbis and Palestinian religious leaders.

2. The Concept of Peace in Christianity

(LtWissDir Prof. Dr. Volker Stümke, Bundeswehr Command and Staff College Hamburg)

In Biblical references to peace, the term is used either in a negative sense meaning absence of war, or positively describing people living together contentedly, which is not often given in reality. Peace is described as a gift from God in three ways: 1. God brings about peace by establishing a just order out of chaos. 2. God overcomes violence and brings peace by intervening. 3. God overcomes violence through love and reconciliation. By refraining from responding to human sins violently and instead chossing to suffer Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, He breaks the circle of violence. This image is the basis for the ethical ideal of a selfless attitude towards others and a commitment to global fairness and charity, which, of course, is merely an ideal which is not often fulfilled by Christians in actuality.

Historically, the secular government is often seen as an entity established to preserve negative peace (i.e. absence of war); both church and state are given their respective and separate aims. The idea of a "just peace", then, describes a legal pacifism, not an absolute one, where violence is restricted but not ruled out. However, some minority groups reject any form of violence, including that of the state, leading them to refuse military service and in some cases withdraw from general society.

In modern times, there has been a paradigm shift in Christian thought about war and peace from a theory of "just war" to a conceptual framework centered on the characteristics of a "just peace". The idea of a just war as the continuation of policy by other means was replaced by that of war as the failure of policy. The notion of a just war as formulated by Thomas Aquinas in adaptation of Augustine and Cicero was already intended to restrict war and

prevent excessive violence. In the late Middle Ages in Spain, further criteria (such as the idea of proportionality and of war as a last resort) were added to the definition of a "just war", particularly to regulate dealings with the natives in South America. The modern conception goes further in maintaining that only peace can ever be just and war is at best a lesser evil. This motivates a paradigm shift in that political considerations start from an idea of peace. This is exemplified in the UN Charter, particularly Article 2.3–4. In this framework, international relations should ideally be focused on peacemaking.

Peace can be understood at many different levels (as peace between humanity and God, the inner peace of an individual, peace between individuals or between communities). It is an interesting question how these levels are connected and whether they are useful for modern discourses, as these different levels have for a long time been regarded separately. As an extreme example, Max Scheler regarded ethicists as signposts, who should point out the right way to others but need not follow it themselves. In this framework, negative peace was all that could be aimed for as an achievable goal. However, there are recent developments within ethics which focus on contentment (German *Zufriedenheit*, which contains the word *Frieden*, peace) and on the conditions for peaceful co-existence, including self-control, which returns personal attitudes to the ethical discourse and shifts the focus back to positive peace. Religious insights also play a role here, even though it is not necessarily essential to be religious in order to cultivate self-control.

The close link between peace and public order can be experienced as oppressive, as expressed in Brian Wren's poem "Say 'no' to peace": "Say 'no' to peace / If what they mean by peace / Is the quiet misery of hunger / […] The unborn hopes of the oppressed." However, to maintain at least the negative sense of peace, some order is needed.

3. The Concept of Peace in Islam
(Prof. Dr. Asma Afsaruddin, Indiana University Bloomington)

Prof. Afsaruddin's paper focused on the interpretatin of certain Qur'ānic verses in which the concept of peace plays a role. For example, Q 49:10 says: "The believers indeed are brothers; so set things right between your two brothers, and fear God; haply so you will find mercy", highlighting the centrality of peaceful relations between believers. Similarly, Q 3:103 and Q 8:63 speak of God bringing the believers' hearts together. The background to this are the long wars between the tribes of Aus and Khazraj, two tribes who were later united in the new

Islamic community, so that the verse can be understood as a denunciation of tribal partisanship. Al-Qurṭubī reads this verse as a warning against discord in the religious community. Q 8:63 stresses that this reconciliation could only have been brought about by God. Mujāhid reads these verses as a general mandate for peace-making and regards the peaceful shaking of hands between believers as a cause for their sins to be forgiven. Q 8:61, which was seen by aṭ-Ṭabarī as generally valid for all times and places, adds that the inclination to peace demands reciprocity and that offers of peace must be accepted.

Q: 60:7–9 delineate a paradigm for peace-making and clarify the conditions for just war and those for peaceful co-existence: "It may be God will yet establish between you and those of them with whom you are at enmity love. God is All-powerful; God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate. God forbids you not, as regards those who have not fought you in religion's cause, nor expelled you from your habitations, that you should be kindly to them, and act justly towards them; surely God loves the just. God only forbids you as to those who have fought you in religion's cause, and expelled you from your habitations, and have supported in your expulsion, that you should take them for friends. And whosoever takes them for friends, those –they are the evildoers." These verses are widely seen as allowing kind and peaceful behaviour towards non-Muslims who do not violently oppose the Muslim community. Q 49:13 ("O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another.") is increasingly cited as an endorsement of pluralism including a non-judgemental recognition of differences.

According to a modern school of thought represented especially by J. Said, *ṣabr* (patience) and forgiveness are the building blocks of peace. Pacifism, according to Said, can be derived from the story of Cain and Abel, as Abel was accepted by God because of his pacifist attitude. Muslims, therefore, should not call for murder or violence, and the faith along with this pacifist attitude should not be abandoned out of fear of force.

Even though the Qur'ān also contains verses with a very different message, including calls to kill non-believers, these verses should be read in the historical context of the war during which they were revealed. The well-known verse Q 9:5, which contains such a call to violence, is read in conjunction with Q 60:7–9, where the criterion for this to apply is the non-Muslims' act of aggression, and is also relativized by Q 9:6, which commands the granting of protection to "idolaters" who request it. Although modern day militants interpret Q 9:5 as abrogating Q

8:61, this is not the opinion of classical commentators such as aṭ-Ṭabarī. In certain contexts, these arguments have been used to rehabilitate militants, especially young people who were vulnerable to radicalization due to a lack of education. *Jihād* in the sense of offensive war in the name of religion was introduced by jurists such as ash-Shāfiʿī; it is not present as a concept in the Qur'ān and in *ḥadīth* tradition.

4. Concluding Discussion

In the publication on the concept of peace, the authors should consider the relation between religious and political discourses on peace. In addition, the concept of peace cannot be understood without its opposite, which should therefore be included in each chapter. The chapter on peace in Islam, for instance, needs to address the concept of *jihād* as well. At the end of each chapter, a practical dimension may be included that might facilitate the process of making peace with religious Jews, Christians, or Muslims by explaining useful contexts in terms of these religions.

The *coincidentia oppositorum* mentioned in the talk on peace in Jewish thought has a mystical element: the appreciation of irreconcilable differences shows something transcendent which spans these differences and makes their co-existence possible. The practical side of peace-making based on a theological definition which takes the irreconcilability of differences seriously should also be mentioned in the publication.

Brueggeman distinguished two trajectories within the Old Testament, one focused on liberation and transformation and one focused on consolidation and stability. Most mentions of *shalom* (peace) are found in texts belonging to the latter, so that the concept seems to be linked to hierarchical structures and order rather than denoting a radical transformation. However, "high points" in Biblical thought can be seen at those points were both of these trajectories intersect, which again links to the idea of peace as unification of opposites.

It can be questioned whether this spiritual view of peace has any practical appeal to the majority and whether an educational component of this theory is necessary to raise a new generation in this framework. Dr Isaacs clarified that within the Jewish context, spiritualism and religion do not overlap as much, since religion is seen more strongly as the practical fulfilment of commandments. Thus, the spiritual is not as offensive to secularly inclined people as it is in societies that define religion in a more spiritual sense. In a divided society, moreover, the longing for opportunities to come together in a deep way is great, so that non-political

interaction has a greater appeal to many than realpolitik, which has been very ineffective so far. It must, however, be kept in mind that such a “coming together” is difficult for those whose daily experience of life is one of oppression.

Another issue is the significance of peace within families and its connection with larger-scale political peace. For both, the Hebrew language uses the same word. Also, peace in the family is a fundamental element within collective peace. Similarly, the Qur’ān also places great importance on peace-making in domestic contexts.

There are three possible ways to limit fundamentalists’ insistence on realizing their worldview in its totality: 1. two sides of a conflict limiting each other (which even if the conflict is defused with a compromise does not fall within the religious Jewish understanding of peace), 2. hermeneutical limitations within a textual tradition, 3. direct, subjective experience of the importance of human dignity.

The old Hebrew word *shalom* and the modern concept of political peace, as has been seen, do not translate into each other well. It may be worth exploring whether this difference has any relation to the dichotomy of negative and positive peace that was mentioned in the paper on peace in Christian thought. It could also be asked if peace in the strong positive sense is possible without peace in the negative sense. Another topic that should be considered in the chapters is how modern believers deal with their respective religion’s violent historical legacy.

The question of whether and how a separation of state and religion is a path to peace can also be discussed. This discussion can consider the difference between a strict separation and a mere distinction between religion and the state (and perhaps also other spheres of human life such as the economy, the sciences, and the family).

Panel Discussion (13 December, 2017)
Toleranz zwischen Juden, Muslimen und Christen – Realität oder Wunschdenken?

Chair: Dr. Katja Thörner (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg). Participants: Prof. Dr. Anna Ayşe Akasoy (City University New York), Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Heiner Bielefeldt (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg), LtWissDir Prof. Dr. Volker Stümke (Bundeswehr Command and Staff College in Hamburg), Prof. Dr. Susanne Talabardon (University of Bamberg)

As Prof. Talabardon pointed out in her opening statement, the term tolerance can be understood in various ways, ranging from mere toleration to great mutual respect. The latter, more common understanding of the term is rarely, or only partially, a reality. However, many people perceive themselves as more tolerant than they actually are. When asked if they are tolerant, many answer affirmatively, but when asked about a concrete issue, they show themselves to be intolerant. Security in one's own convictions is often seen as necessary for tolerance towards others, but at the same time, such tolerance demands a certain liberality. In a way, this paradox is easier to resolve for Jews than for adherents of other religions since Judaism is not a universal religion with a call to proselytize and "the righteous among the nations" are considered to share in the world to come. Throughout most of history, being tolerated by others has been a greater problem for Jews than tolerating others. A theology of interreligious dialogue would have to be developed first by each religion for itself.

Prof. Stümke distinguished three dimensions of tolerance: In personal experience, in social, and in political contexts. His own personal contacts with Muslims, for example, on the volleyball team, are not problematic, but it is questionable whether this is actual tolerance or just an ignorance of differences since religious differences are unimportant and hardly noticeable in sports. Problems of tolerance in social contexts can be exemplified by the case of hospitals, nurseries etc. owned by the church. Because of the shortage of trained workers, many such institutions hire staff members who belong to different religions. This does not cause any large-scale problems, but can lead to conflict about details in certain cases, for example concerning holidays and prayer times. Again speaking from experience, Prof. Stümke then spoke about the perception of other religions in the German army. As there are hardly any Muslims (or Jews) in the German army, most soldiers' only experience of Muslims is in the field and therefore in the context of conflict. They might know intellectually that Muslims are

also often victims or offer peaceful resistance (e.g. in Rwanda), but their direct experience of Islam is dominated by violence.

In her opening statement, Prof. Akasoy made clear that tolerance is directed first and foremost towards people, not Jews, Muslims or Christians *per se*. Tolerance also only becomes a topic of discussion when there is a lack of it. It remains an open question what role religion plays for tolerance or intolerance: as motivation or as an instrument. Regarding Islam specifically, both tolerance and intolerance can be justified with reference to the Qur'ān. Intolerance, however, is often a greater internal problem amongst Muslims than an interreligious one with respect to non-Muslims. This is partially because tolerance does not mean theological similarity but allowing the existence of divergent views and practices. In fact, someone whose beliefs differ from one's own who claims to belong to the same religion can cause greater irritation than does someone with even more different beliefs from an entirely different tradition.

Prof. Bielefeldt maintained that tolerance between religions is both reality and wishful thinking. There are societies, neighbourhoods and families where peaceful co-existence is a reality, for example, in many West African countries the co-existence of Christians and Muslims as well as conversions between the two religions are a matter of course. There are, however, other places where such peaceful relations are an ideal that is extremely hard to realise. This is true both among different religions and among different sects within each religion. This internal pluralism is often neglected in interfaith projects. The central idea of such projects is not tolerance but the human right to freedom of religion, which is more clearly defined and more easily enforced. Human rights provide the infrastructure for acceptance despite differences, incomprehension and even disapproval. Public institutions play an important role in this process, as without strong public institutions there is no space for safe public communication, leading people to organise their survival within their own communities. This causes a lack of trust in people and institutions outside these narrow communities.

Tolerance is a phenomenon of social psychology rather than religion. It applies to different political views as well as to different religious beliefs. Even political opponents must be tolerated and their rights respected, but that does not mean they cannot be viewed as opponents. The same is true for adherents of other religions: respecting their rights does not

mean agreeing with their views. Tolerance is not a legal category, but applies in the personal and civic spheres.

Hans Küng's idea of a *Weltethos* ("global ethic") was not seen as helpful in this context by the participants. Firstly, the idea that "we all believe in the same God" is too vague to be helpful, while, for example, discussions between Christians and Jews about their mutual holy text (the Hebrew Bible) would provide more grounds for civilised disagreement. Secondly, the emphasis on similarities and commonalities between religions shows an anti-pluralistic tendency. It would be more realistic and more honest to promote peaceful relations while acknowledging fundamental differences.

Globalisation affects the issue of tolerance in different ways. On the one hand, the rising insecurity many people feel in a globalised world leads many to cling more strongly to their identity, which is manifested in a strengthening of the political margins and a rise of intolerance. At the same time, new global groups also form new group identities, which are no longer linked to place or ethnicity.

The injunction against hypocrisy found in the Bible provides Christianity with a mechanism for self-relativization. Understanding one's country as a Christian state already puts one in danger of falling into the trap of hypocrisy. Similarly, many religious scriptures contain mechanisms that preclude totalitarian or radical viewpoints. Radicals are often those who do not know their own tradition in any depth. Therefore, one way to contribute to peaceful relations between different religions is to spread education about religions and avoid generalisations and half-truths.