



Convivenzia 2.0 - Christian-Islamic Summerschools (Frankfurt University of Theology and Philosophy Sankt Georgen)

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Abstract: The article presents the idea of Christian-Islamic Summerschools, which have been organized jointly by the Jesuit University of Philosophy and Theology and the Muslim Dialogue Association FID for several years. The focus is on existential encounter and spiritual exchange. The article discusses the basic idea, the program and the lessons learned from the experience.

It is not the abundance of knowledge that leads to a deeper understanding, but the sensitivity for the "inner meaning and taste of things", as Ignatius of Loyola wrote almost five hundred years ago. Could this not also apply to the Christian-Islamic encounter? How does one move from knowledge about each other to a deeper understanding, to a sensitivity for what is vital to the other (one) in the truest sense of the word? To reach an authentic encounter, to which Muslims feel challenged by the Koran verse 49:13: "O men, We created you from a male and female, and formed you into nations and tribes that you may recognise each other. He who has more integrity has indeed greater honor with God. Surely God is all-knowing and well-informed".

This question led to the idea of a special Christian-Muslim Summer School: It ties in with the study programme "Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations", in which students of the University of Philosophy and Theology Sankt Georgen in Frankfurt have for almost twenty years the opportunity to engage oneself intellectually and intensively with the history and current challenges of interreligious encounter. The Summer School takes up the aim of the study programme to learn about the history of interreligious relations and to systematically search

for differences and similarities, but sets its own accents: The focus of the Summer School is to meet each other on an existential level and to experience the other as believer in his and her religious practices. This focus is reflected in the choice of location, the programme and the daily routine. So far three events took place: in Prizren and Tirana (Kosovo and Albania), in the Monastery of Münsterschwarzach (South Germany) and in Granada (Andalusia/Spain), which were organised in cooperation with the Muslim institution *Forum for Intercultural Dialogue*, which is Hizmet affiliated and has been active in the interreligious and intercultural field since 2002.

With the ‚Association Loyola-Gymnasium‘ (a private grammar school, founded by the German Jesuits) in Prizren/Kosovo, the Münsterschwarzach Monastery and the Monastery of the Comendadores di Santiago in Granada, **distinctive places** have been chosen which already in themselves make spiritual life a theme. Conversely, the presence of the Christian-Muslim group immediately arouses curiosity in these places, leads to questions and creates opportunities for encounters, whether with members of the religious community or with pupils and visitors to the places. Thus, the visit changes not only the participants, but also creates new openness in the place itself. At the same time, Kosovo, Albania and Andalusia offer themselves as such places where, on the one hand, none of the participants – even linguistically – is "at home" and which, on the other hand, clearly demonstrate the opportunities (and problems) of a shared history.

The **programme** is essentially about reflected experience. The participants worked on different religious biographies, which clearly show the connection between individual faith and life. While in Kosovo the focus was on important mystics from Yunus Emre to Rābi‘a from Baṣra to Edith Stein, the biographies in Granada with Francisco Suárez, Ibn ‘Arabī and Muhammad Asad were oriented towards Andalusia itself. In all cases, the work on historical persons should also give impulses for the own interpretation of life and motivate to work on the own faith biography. The preparation of the lectures in small Christian-Muslim groups is a decisive element in the coordination of the content. In this way, contacts could already be established before the trip, which favored a more personal exchange about the presented content.

The **daily routine** also serves the purpose of personal exchange. In addition to the thematic work and the encounters and visits on site, the daily routine was essentially spiritually structured: The beginning of each day with a jointly prepared morning impulse – in Albania

with a beautiful view of the mountains! – enables a meditative basic mood. This mood was deepened by the respectful participation at the prayer service of the respective other - an important element of each journey. Above all, however, the regular, detailed personal reflection rounds (especially in Kosovo and Albania) proved to be a simple but effective element that led the participants into the personal encounter. Undoubtedly, the Christian-Islamic shared rooms also contributed significantly to the deepening of the personal encounter, as did periods of time which are characterized by joint activities rather than a planned programme: The cooking and washing up together in the self-catering house in Münsterschwarzach, the long bus journeys in Kosovo and Albania and the extensive footpaths in Granada.

So we learned above all: It is not primarily the religious similarities or differences that determine whether a real encounter takes place. It is important to bring together the two groups from the very beginning: To prepare the program together, to let the participants prepare a seminar paper together in mixed groups in advance and - very important - to share the sleeping- and livingrooms. Shared daily life is the foundation of every interreligious encounter. On this foundation, curiosity and openness for the religion of the other can grow. "Before God we cannot be alone", the Catholic patriarchs of the Middle East formulate and call the faithful to "spiritual solidarity". Thus, the Summerschool is a first step towards seeing oneself in the diversity of faith on a common path and recognising in the other pilgrims in search of the truth. The next could be to actually go on common pilgrimages.