

Helene Egnell and Annette Esser

European Projects and Initiatives for Women's Interreligious Dialogue

ATE – Asociación de Teólogas Españolas

La Asociación de Teólogas Españolas (ATE) nace en 1992 porque cada vez hay más mujeres que elaboran una teología feminista desde una perspectiva académica y casi todas se unen con el fin de hacer ciencia teológica propia e impulsar también el pensamiento multidisciplinar. La ATE ha sido y es canal de debate y encuentro entre teólogas y entre investigadoras feministas de distintas disciplinas y religiones. Canalizados a través de las Jornadas que la asociación organiza anualmente hemos debatido sobre “Espiritualidad y Empoderamiento” 2005, “Historia, Memoria y Género” 2006, “Mujeres, Salud y Salvación” 2007 y “Mujer Palabra y Comunidad Eclesial” 2008, sólo para citar los debates más recientes.

www.asociaciondeteologas.org

Centre for Inter Faith Dialogue, Stockholm

The Centre for Inter Faith Dialogue was established in January 2008, as a resource for praxis and reflection on interfaith encounters. The centre is funded by the diocese of Stockholm together with the national level of the Church of Sweden. The centre wishes to contribute to cooperation and good relations between Christians and people of other faith through

- Providing support for activities in the fields of interfaith encounters within the local parishes of the Church of Sweden, with a focus on the Stockholm area.
- Offering courses, discussion evenings, dialogue groups etc.
- Channelling knowledge, contacts, literature etc.
- Theological reflection on experiences of interfaith encounters.

The centre is run by the Bishop's advisors Rev. Dr. Helene Egnell and Rev. Annika Wirén:

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EPIL – European Project for Interreligious Learning

EPIL is a European project for interreligious learning between Christian and Muslim women. It is an educational process to train students to understand and manage religious diversity in order to build equitable and peaceful communities. It focuses on Christian-Muslim relations and on the role of women in creation and culture. The project aims to:

- show how Islam and Christianity are “systems of being in the world”,
- explore the nature of religious freedom in the secular and democratic context of European societies,
- build awareness of the historical role of Islam in Europe and the way memories shape today’s relationships in everyday life,
- analyse conditions that may lead to a misuse of religion for non-religious purposes and identify ways to avoid it,
- develop a gender perspective, keeping the viewpoint and contributions in focus,
- harness the potential of religion to create an everyday culture of peace and social harmony, and explore the role of women in this process,
- train students in proven methods of dialogue, communication and conflict mediation.

The European Project for Interreligious Learning, Study Course 2007-09 is a co-operation with the *Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women*.

www.epil.ch

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EWNF – European Women of Faith Network

On May 22, 2008, a groundbreaking meeting with women from over 13 European Countries was held in Rovereto, Italy, to establish the *Religions for Peace European Women of Faith Network*. The newly created network was officially presented during the European Conference of *Religions for Peace* that took place in Rovereto from 22-24 May 2008, bringing together over 250 delegates from 35 countries in Europe. *Religions for Peace* – accredited as a non-governmental organization (NGO) to the United Nations – is the world’s largest multi-religious coalition advancing common action for peace since 1970. The NGO works with women of faith networks, youth networks and 70 affiliated inter-religious councils in six continents of the world. The European Women of Faith Network is one of the four regional women of faith

networks within *Religions for Peace Global Women of Faith Network*. The Coordinator of the global network, Mehrezia Labidi-Maiza from France said that “women are core to their faith communities but not necessarily seen as religious leaders. We need to validate the important work that women do and be a force for peace in the world”. The co-chairs of the EWFN, Ravinder Kaur Nijjar, from Scotland and Yolande Iliano, from Belgium stated that this network will put into practice the shared human and spiritual values of Faiths in Europe in all aspects of its work and relationships to advance peace and shared security. Thus the European Network will:

- Enhance interfaith networking among women of faith in Europe through practical projects.
- Promote gender equality and women's empowerment in multi-religious collaboration for peace.

In November 2008 the EWFN was invited to introduce itself at the European Union in Brussels during a luncheon. A support of its work was promised by the EU for the future.

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FACIT – Feministischer Arbeitskreis christlicher und islamischer Theologinnen

Der *feministische Arbeitskreis christlicher und islamischer Theologinnen* hat sich in Köln im Juni 2004 im Anschluss an das Ausstellungsprojekt mit Begleitprogramm „*Jede hat ihren Glauben, aber es ist ein Gott*“ – *Begegnungen mit Musliminnen aus der Region*“ formiert. Zur Präsentation einer Wanderausstellung, die von Theologie-Dozentinnen und Studierenden der RWTH Aachen gemacht worden war¹, fand sich eine interreligiöse Projektgruppe, getragen von der Köln-Bonner Gruppe ‚Religions for Peace‘ (RfP), vom ‚Zentrum für islamische Frauenforschung und Frauenförderung‘ (ZIF),

¹ Miriam Neubert / Ursula Rudnick (Hg.), „*Jede hat ihren Glauben, aber es ist ein Gott*“. *Begegnungen mit muslimischen Frauen* (Hora-Verlag: Hannover 2003).

von der Evangelischen Arbeitsstelle für Christlich-Muslimische Begegnung, vom Katholischen Stadtdekanat und vom ‚Referat für interreligiösen Dialog des Erzbistums Köln‘ (Refidi) zusammen, um ein Begleitprogramm mit einem Kabarett, Vortrags- und Gesprächsabenden und einer gemeinsamen Liturgie zu veranstalten.

Die Reflexion dieser Ausstellung führte dazu, dass sich eine Gruppe aus katholischen, evangelischen und muslimische Theologinnen formierte, die sich später den Namen „FACIT“ gab. Wie es eine muslimische Teilnehmerin ausdrückten, geht es in diesem Kreis darum, „endlich miteinander Tacheles zu reden“, das heißt, über populäre Themen wie die leidige Kopftuchfrage hinaus in einen feministisch-theologisch engagierten interreligiösen Dialog über heiße Themen zu treten, wie Gewalt gegen Frauen, Wahrheit, Monotheismus / Dreifaltigkeit, Jesus in Bibel und Koran, oder Fundamentalismus. Um in geschütztem Raum offen miteinander reden zu können, tagt dieser Kreis nicht öffentlich; doch können auf Anfrage weitere Frauen dazu kommen.

Seinen ersten öffentlichen Auftritt hatte FACIT am 8. Juni 2007 auf dem Evangelischen Kirchentag in Köln, wobei zum Thema „Wahrheit, die ich meine – Wahrheitsanspruch im Gespräch“ zunächst außen stehende ZuhörerInnen zu einem „Fisbowl-Gespräch“ in den Gesprächskreis eingeladen wurden. Diese Form der Einladung zum interreligiösen Dialog setzt FACIT seitdem in weiteren Veranstaltungen fort. Weitere Aktivitäten, auch über den Kölner Raum hinaus, werden geplant.

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ICETH – Interreligious Conference of European Women Theologians / Interreligiöse Konferenz Europäischer Theologinnen

ICETH was founded in 2005, after some years as the “Initiative Conference of European Women Theologians”. It started as an initiative within the German association of Protestant women theologians, “Konvent Evangelischer Theologinnen in der BRD”, for supporting Catholic women’s demand for ordination. However, because of the close relationship and cooperation between the German women theologians and Muslim women activists connected to the Centre for research and empowerment of Islamic women in Cologne (ZIF – Zentrum für Islamische Frauenforschung und Frauenförderung), it was soon decided that the initiative was to be interreligious and work for the rights and status of women in all religious communities, especially the Christian, Muslim and Jewish ones.

ICETH has the following goals:

- to discover the spiritual dimension of inter-confessional and inter-religious encounters;
- to reflect on commonalities and differences in hermeneutical positions;
- to form a community of solidarity for the equality of women theologians in all fields and at all levels;
- to connect theological scholarship and ministry at community level in theory and practice;
- to contribute to peace in Europe through furthering interreligious understanding.

In relation to ESWTR, ICETH is more activist, in that it actively promotes women's ordination. It is also more consciously interreligious, in that interreligious cooperation and understanding is one of its explicit aims. Though some of its members work in the academy, it is more geared towards theologically trained women working in religious institutions and in education.

ICETH currently has about 70 Christian, Muslim and Jewish members from 10 European countries. Members meet for an annual conference, and keep in contact through a Newsletter and the homepage.

www.iketh.eu.

Women's Inter Faith Initiatives in the UK

A plethora of women's inter-faith initiatives has arisen in the UK over the last decades. A survey was made by Fatheena Mubarak for the Inter Faith Network for the UK, in which she recorded 42 initiatives.

She found six broad types of women's inter faith initiatives:

- freestanding inter faith initiatives that have been set up by women;
- women's inter faith initiatives that are part of a larger inter faith organization;
- women's inter faith initiatives that are part of a larger single faith organization or initiative;
- women's inter faith initiatives that are part of a secular organization;
- women's initiatives that are not specifically inter faith in their aims;
- inter faith initiatives for girls and young women within secondary or higher education.

The most popular types of activities mentioned in the survey are: shared meals; dialogue; discussion and meetings; and celebrations of special events and days.

Fatheena Mubarak found, not surprising, that most initiatives operate on a very small budget or no budget at all, and that most of the work is done on a voluntary basis.

A few examples of Women's inter faith initiatives in the UK:

- The *Women's Peace Meeting* in Birmingham started during the war in Bosnia 1993, with mainly Christian women who met to pray for peace. They continued to meet after that war, and gradually the group became inter faith. At the meetings, the women share thoughts about their faith, life experiences, social issues etc. Practical outcomes of the meetings have included help for refugees, fundraising and travelling on pilgrimage together.
- *Asian Women's Advisory Service* offers a drop-in centre for Asian women. In a inter faith volunteering project, they trained volunteers, all women, from the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities to enable better relations and strengthen the links between faith groups.
- *The Leicester Christian-Muslim Women's Group* was set up in 2002 for women of Christian and Muslim backgrounds to explore aspects of each other's beliefs and practices. It meets approximately once in six weeks and has covered topics such as traditions in Islam, denominations in Christianity, marriage customs and the scriptures.

The report can be downloaded from the website of the Inter Faith network:

www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/womenssurvey06.pdf

Sarah und Hagar

Sarah und Hagar als Stammütter der sogenannten „Abrahamitischen Religionen“ (Judentum, Christentum und Islam) gaben im Jahr 2001 zwei interreligiösen und überparteilichen Fraueninitiativen den Namen. Sie wurden unabhängig voneinander in Hessen und Berlin ins Leben gerufen. In beiden Fällen arbeiteten Frauen aus Politik und Religion Hand in Hand.

In Berlin wurde die Idee von der Journalistin und Rabbinerin Elisa Klaphack und der evangelischen Pfarrerin Gerdi Nützel entwickelt. Carola von Braun griff die Idee auf und stellte die Verknüpfung zur Überparteilichen Fraueninitiative Berlin (ÜPFI) her. Die Finanzierung übernahm das Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend. Die hessische Initiative entstand in enger Kooperation mit dem hessischen Sozialministerium und der Evangelischen Akademie Arnoldshain.

Inzwischen findet sich unter dem Dach dieser Initiativen ein weitmaschiges bundesweites Netzwerk von Frauen aus Politik und Religionswissenschaften. Ziel ist der interreligiöse Austausch über gemeinsame politische Anliegen. Frauen aus Politik und Religion verständigen sich jenseits von Parteiinteressen oder Reglementierungen durch religiöse Institutionen. Sie treffen sich regional, überregional und bundesweit zu Tagungen, Workshops und Kongressen. Für das Jahr 2011, im 10jährigen Bestehen der Initiative, wird ein bundesweiter Kongress geplant, um die Arbeit der letzten Jahre auszuwerten.²

Die Initiative findet derzeit Platz unter dem Dach des Bendorfer Forums für ökumenische Begegnung und interreligiösen Dialog: www.bendorferforum.de und des EVAngelischen Frauenbegegnungszentrums Frankfurt: www.eva-frauenzentrum.de

Sophia

Recientemente, entre los pasos que se van dando debemos destacar la experiencia del grupo *Sophia*, que nace a partir de la Cátedra de las Tres Religiones de la Universidad de Valencia. El grupo está integrado por mujeres de diferentes tradiciones religiosas de la Ciudad de Valencia; se trata de una de las pocas iniciativas que no parten de una tradición religiosa particular. La asociación Sophia que vio la luz en Mayo del 2007 está formada por mujeres judías, católicas, musulmanas, bramakhumaris, budistas, etc., y pretende ser un foro abierto a todos y todas las “*que deseen participar en el desarrollo de una conciencia de paz y amor que el mundo de hoy tanto necesita*”.

www.asociaciondeteologas.org

² Zur weiteren Information: Annette Mehlhorn, „Religion – Politik – Gender. Geschichte und Hintergründe der interreligiösen Initiative ‚Sarah und Hagar‘“, in: *EPD Dokumentation* 31.1.2006, 6. Die Initiative wurde 2009 mit dem Leonore-Siegele-Wenschkewitz-Preis ausgezeichnet.