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Nya Vägar: Report on the Nya Vägar Seminars on "Striving -- Jihad -- against social exclusion: New Ways of tackling discrimination through co-operation among Christians, Muslims, and other organisations"

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NYA VÄGAR

Report on the Nya Vägar Seminars

ON

"Striving – Jihâd – against social exclusion:
New Ways of tackling discrimination through cooperation
among Christians, Muslims, and other organizations."

compiled by
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MARCH *2007*

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INTRODUCTION

THE NYA VÄGAR SEMINARS

"Nya Vägar"refers to a range of activities in Malmö in autumn 2006 (September-December) that addressed issues of discrimination, social exclusion, and long-term unemployment in the city. These activities include a series of seminars – the Nya Vägar Seminars – that aimed to

explore experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, and long-term unemployment, with special reference to the Muslim communities;

identify ways of dealing with these problems through dialogue between Christian, Muslim and other voluntary organizations;

initiate a common reflection among Muslims, Christians and other social activists; and

stimulate a constructive public debate about ways of overcoming discrimination, social exclusion, and long-term unemployment.

The Nya Vägar Seminars were organized under the banner headline:
"Striving – *jihâd* – against social exclusion: New Ways of tackling discrimination through cooperation among Christians, Muslims, and other organizations."

PARTNERS IN THE NYA VÄGAR SEMINARS

The Nya Vägar Seminars were a cooperative venture between several organizations in Malmö and Lund:

Church of Sweden, Kirseberg Parish, Malmö
Church of Sweden, Lund Diocese, Lund
Lund University, Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund
Malmö City Mission, Malmö
Swedish Islamic Support, Malmö

International participation involved:

Islamic-Christian Study Centre, Copenhagen, Denmark
St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in Multi-Faith Society, Leicester, UK

PARTICIPANTS ON THE NYA VÄGAR SEMINARS

The twenty-five participants represented a cross-section of the community, including women and men, younger and older age groups, professionals and students, and persons of Christian, Muslim and secular persuasion. Most participants were Swedish, but several international participants contributed wider European perspectives.

SPONSORS OF THE NYA VÄGAR SEMINARS

The seminars were financed by the Swedish Council of the European Social Fund, and linked to Equal-Dissemination and Effective Action.[1]
(www.esf.se/esf/templates/Page.aspx?id=607)

[1] The European Social Fund is responsible for advancing employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability, and equal opportunity for men and women in the work place in EU member states. "Equal" is one of the main funding programmes operated by the Swedish ESF to develop new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality in the work place.

CONTEXT

The Nya Vägar Seminars took a contextual approach to "Striving – *jihâd* – against social exclusion."

MALMÖ

The primary context was the city of Malmö.

Sweden's third largest city, with a population of a little more than 270,000, Malmö has a higher percentage of immigrants – approximately 40% – than anywhere else in Sweden. There are more than one hundred different nationalities represented among immigrants in Malmö.

Malmö also has the largest concentration of Muslims – c.50,000 – of any Swedish city. The Islamic Center provides religious and cultural facilities for people of more than ninety national backgrounds. The largest number of Muslims in Malmö come from the Balkans, but many other Muslim regions and cultures are represented as well.

Unemployment in parts of Malmö runs at about 50%. While this affects the whole city, it has a direct social and economic impact on the Muslim population. This accentuates the Muslims' experience of social marginalization. Malmö, like other Nordic and European cities, faces acute challenges about more effective ways of including Muslims in contemporary multi-cultural society.

LEICESTER

The secondary context was the city of Leicester, UK, chosen for purposes of comparison with the situation in Malmö.

Leicester – a city of about the same size as Malmö – experienced waves of immigration from the 19th century, intensively since the 1950s. About 36% of the population comprises ethnic minority communities, the majority being South Asians. Today the ethnic minority communities make significant contributions to the city's economic, social and political life. Leicester is a model case of multi-cultural society in Britain.

Muslims make up the third largest religious community in Leicester, after Christians and Hindus. 80% of new refugees are Muslims – Iraqis, Kurds, Bosnians, Kosovans, Iranians, etc. The Federation of Muslim Organisations, and the Muslim Burial Council coordinate Muslim affairs in Leicester, and represent the Muslim population in dealings with the City Council.
Based in Leicester, St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in Multi-Faith Society is a nationally-recognized centre of excellence for the study and promotion of inter-religious dialogue in Britain. It works in partnership with the Islamic Foundation, one of the longest-established Muslim educational groups in Britain, also based in Leicester.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the Nya Vägar Seminars was based on five elements:

1. STRIVING – JIHÂD

The Arabic word *jihâd* is accurately translated as "striving." Islamic teaching emphasizes that the "Greater *Jihâd*" entails the striving of the heart, the tongue, and the hand – the spiritual, educational and social aspects of *jihâd*.

The Nya Vägar Seminars embraced this understanding of *jihâd*, and explored ways in which religious and secular people can "strive" together in tackling problems of discrimination, social exclusion, and long-term unemployment in Malmö.

2. DIALOGUE

"Dialogue" means the building of constructive relations between people of different religions, and between religions and secular groups. In the Catholic Church and among the Protestant and Orthodox churches of the World Council of Churches, it is dialogue is described under four categories: "dialogue of life", "dialogue of actions", "dialogue of words" and "dialogue of the heart".

The Nya Vägar Seminars concentrated on the first two forms of dialogue – "dialogue of life" and "dialogue of actions" – concentrating on the social challenges of "striving" together.

3. LISTENING, EXPERIENCING, REFLECTING, ACTING

Dialogue is a *praxis*, a way of engaging the "other" that seeks to create understanding, relationship and cooperation.

The Nya Vägar Seminars organized their approach to dialogue around mutual listening, sympathetic openness to each other's experience, reflecting together on what we learned, and identifying ways in which participants could work together in joint action.

4. INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATION

In order to understand the Malmö context with some comparative perspective, the Nya Vägar Seminars developed a conversation with comparable projects in Denmark (Islamic-Christian Study Centre, Copenhagen) and Britain (St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in Multi-Faith Society, Leicester). The aim was not to use these as models, but to enhance understanding of the multi-contextual dimensions of the Nya Vägar Seminars, and self-critical awareness of the Swedish context.

5. ENGAGEMENT WITH SECULARITY

Sweden is a secular society and culture. This shapes the self-identity of Swedish Christians and the role of Swedish churches. Muslims in Sweden also tend to be more influenced by secularity than are Muslims in more traditional cultures.

While questioning secularism as an ideology that is often attacks religion, the Nya Vägar Seminars affirmed the secularity of Swedish society as a liberating basis for dialogue and cooperation between religious and secular groups in a cooperative striving/*jihâd* against discrimination.

FIRST MALMÖ SEMINAR:
23 SEPTEMBER 2006

The first Malmö seminar focused on Islam and Christianity in multi-cultural society. The aim was to develop the first skill of dialogue – to meet each other and listen to each other.

Speakers included representatives from Swedish Islamic Support and the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University, and guests from St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in Multi-Faith Society, Leicester, UK.

What should Christians and others know about Islam?
Emerick Adolfsson (Swedish Islamic Support) addressed this question by presenting Islam as "a link in the same chain."

Muslims share many fundamental beliefs with Christians and Jews, and have a common outlook on life. While it is important to respect differences between the three religions, Muslims in Sweden want to show that Islam is not an alien "other," but a "link in a chain."

Since "9/11" (2001) this linkage has been obscured by widespread public fear of Islam ("Islamophobia.") This misrepresents what Islam actually teaches. Muslims experience this as form of discrimination.

Emerick contrasted such misrepresentations with a statement of what Islam actually teaches:

Rather than believing in their own God (= misrepresentation), Muslims believe that "there is no god but God", and that Jews, Christians and Muslims believe in the same God.

Rather than worshipping Muhammad (= misrepresentation), Muslims follow him as the final prophet of God, the successor to Abraham, Moses and Jesus whom they also respect.

Rather than hating Jesus (= misrepresentation), Muslims honour him as a genuine prophet, and respect Mary his mother.

Rather than treating the Qur'an as a book written by Muhammad (= misrepresentation), Muslims believe that it is a divine revelation from God, and confirms the truth of the Torah and Gospel.

Rather than being an Arab religion (= misrepresentation), Muslims believe that Islam is a universal message of peace (*salâm*) – meaning the same as *shalôm* – for all human beings.

Rather than teaching fatalism or violence (= misrepresentation), Islam requires Muslims to "strive" for peace, justice and goodness on earth – the real meaning of *jihâd*.

How does Islam function in a multi-cultural society?

Suleman Nagdi (St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in Multi-Faith Society, Leicester, UK) addressed this question by explaining how Muslims in Leicester represent themselves through a single Federation on Muslim Organisations (FMO), of which he is the official spokesperson.

FMO is an umbrella organization for the Muslim organizations that have grown up in Leicester over the past thirty years. Its aim is to negotiate mutual understanding and cooperation between the Muslim communities and the City Council. He illustrated this with examples from the health service and police service.

In consultation with health practitioners FMO has developed *Guidelines for Nursing Staff* for the care of Muslim patients.

FMO has developed close working relations with the Leicestershire police force that have helped maintain harmonious community relations in times of great stress – as around the "7/7" (2005) bombings in the London transport services.

In consultation with both the health and police services, the Muslim Burial Council of Leicestershire deals with the issues relating to the death and burial of members of the Muslim communities, reconciling the requirements of English and Islamic law.

Speaking about the work of the Muslim-Christian Dialogue Group in Leicester, Suleman emphasized that it seeks to identify problems that arise in the community, and to find ways of solving them.

What should Muslims and others know about Christianity?

Andrew Wingate (St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in Multi-Faith Society, Leicester, UK) discussed challenges that face the Christian churches in multi-cultural Leicester.

The growth of ethnic and religious diversity confronts Christians with a choice: either to retreat into their own society, or to engage the new reality with openness.

The heart of Christian teaching is "love God and love your neighbour as yourself". (Matthew 22:37-39.) St Philip's Centre seeks to be a positive presence in Leicester's multi-cultural society, showing how faith communities can work together to promote the common good.

This involves Christians working with people of other faiths as allies, not enemies or competitors, especially in political, economic and social areas.
It is important to develop mutual acceptance and cooperation among young people. Education for dialogue is of the highest importance.

An effective example of education of young adults in Leicester is the Intercultural Communication and Leadership School (http://www.intercivilization.net) that organizes residential weekend courses for people of different cultures, religions and ethnicities, helping them to live together, interact and function as a community in a peaceful and mutually prosperous way.

Openness and cooperation can also include leisure time activities. This was pioneered in Leicester when Christian clergy and Muslim imams played a football match, umpired by Hindu and Jewish referees – the Muslims won, 5-0. This was followed by a joint cricket match on the anniversary of "9/11."
(http://www.benravilious.com/photo.asp?photo_id=20060911_DSC_2437)

These examples illustrate how inter-religious dialogue helps people of different ethnic and religious identities to meet each other, get to know each other, work and play together in building "social cohesion." Religions represent great "social capital" in our modern pluralist cities – provided they cooperate, rather than compete against each other, and create conflict.

Andrew concluded by stressing that religious communities can also to share their spiritual resources with each other, and for the common good. Praying for each other – and as occasion makes appropriate – praying with each other are ways of dialogue that deserve deeper attention.

How Christians understand dialogue

David Kerr (Centre of Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University) concluded the day with a discussion of inter-religious dialogue from a Christian perspective, taking account of the recent lecture of Pope Benedict XVI at Regensburg University, Germany.

The Pope's lecture, entitled "Faith, Reason and the University", explored the relationship between Christianity and reason. The central argument is that Christianity is a religion of rationality, since Christian theology is built on biblical revelation and Greek philosophy. Secularity therefore has no monopoly on reason; indeed, the Pope argued that secularism is less rational than Christianity because it excludes the rationality of faith.

The passage of the Pope's lecture that created controversy was his quotation of the 15th century Byzantine Emperor Manuel II who argued that Islam is a religion of violence. The Pope subsequently stated that his intended only to make the point that violence is irrational, and that violence in the name of religion contradicts the rationality of faith. By

appearing to characterize Islam as a violent religion, he was heard by many – Muslims and others – to imply that Islam is not a rational religion, and is alien to the rationality of modern secular/European culture.

How is this relevant to the Nya Vägar Seminars? David made the following points:

The anger that the lecture provoked among Muslims throughout the world illustrates the danger of stereotyping another religion – especially when electronic media can convert what the Pope characterized as an "academic discussion" in a German university into international headline news.

The lecture illustrates the problem of justifying the merits of one's own religion by emphasizing the perceived demerits of another religion. Christianity has frequently engaged in violence – for example, the medieval Crusades against Islam. Medieval Islam embraced much of the same tradition of Greek philosophy as did Christianity.

The best that can be concluded from the lecture is that it reminds us that rationality is a shared property: Greek philosophy provides a rational basis for Christianity, Islam and the European Enlightenment.
Christians, Muslims and secularists are challenged to dialogue with each other on the basis of rationality. Rationality does not exclude faith.

Since the lecture, the Pope has reiterated his commitment to inter-religious dialogue, especially among Christians and Muslims. He has done so within the four-fold definition of dialogue developed by the Vatican's Secretariat for Inter-Religious Relations:
"dialogue of life", the "dialogue of actions", the "dialogue of words", and the "dialogue of the heart".

In similar fashion most British churches have agreed four principles of interfaith dialogue:

dialogue begins where people meet each other;
dialogue seeks mutual understanding and trust;
dialogue is a way of serving together the society we share;
dialogue is a way of bearing authentic witness.

These definitions of dialogue can help the Nya Vägar project to find its way forward in the context of Malmö's culture of secular multiculturalism.

Second Malmö Seminar: 7 October 2006

The second Malmö seminar focused on ways in which Muslims experience discrimination, and the work of the Islamic-Christian Study Centre in Copenhagen. The aim was to develop the dialogical skill of learning from the experience of others.

How do Muslims experience discrimination in Malmö?

Salih Tufekcioglu (Swedish Islamic Support) described Muslim experiences of discrimination in Sweden. In order to avoid generalization, he built his presentation around three case studies, each involving real people in real situations in recent time.

Case study 1: Bilal's search of housing in Malmö

Bilal is an immigrant from Lebanon. He came to Karlshamn, and then moved to Rosengård. To help his children integrate into Swedish society, he wanted to move to another part of Malmö so that they could go to school with Swedish children. But with an Arab name, and a Rosengård address, he found it impossible to be re-housed in any other part of Malmö. He felt trapped in a cultural ghetto. Eventually he moved back to Karlshamn, and succeeded in being re-housed in Lund.

Case study 2: Duaa Daebes' struggle for employment in Liseberg

Duaa Daebes is an immigrant from Iraq. She is a student, and applied for a summer job as the amusement park in Liseberg, Göteborg. She was better qualified than other applicants, but was refused employment because, as a devout Muslim woman, she wears a head veil *(hijâb*) and covers her arms and legs. She appealed to the Discrimination Ombudsman (DO) who took up her case with the amusement park authority. It agreed to reverse its decision, and to employ and compensate Duaa – and designed a special uniform for her, and other Muslim employees, in the Liseberg colours.

Case study 3: Nadja Jebril and Swedish Television (SVT)

Nadja Jebril is a Palestinian Muslim women who was brought up in Lund. She wanted to be a TV journalist, and worked for SVT's multi-cultural programme, "Mosaic". But when she applied for the job as programme presenter, she was refused – because she wears a head veil (*hijâb*). Her case created the first public debate in Sweden about the rights of Muslim women in the work place.
This clarified that Swedish law allows employees – women and men – to wear religious clothing at work. So Nadja was given the job, but then SVT closed the programme – and Nadja, with her veil, moved to host a programme on Swedish food!

Reflecting on these case studies, Salih drew several conclusions:

Discrimination occurs when individuals are denied their legal rights by organizations that make prejudicial judgments against them on grounds of ethnicity, culture or religion.

Discrimination affects individual people, Muslim women often being on the front line of discrimination is Sweden today.

Discrimination is most effectively contested and changed by those who are victimized by it. They must refuse to accept it, and take those who perpetrate it to the Discrimination Ombudsman. (http://www.do.se)

This is in line with the principle of the Qur'an: "God doesn't change people until they change themselves" (Qur'an 13:11.)

Discrimination in the media

Per-Erik Persson, Andreas Stephens and Ali Hamidian (Notis för en dag) explored the area in which Muslims feel most discriminated – the misrepresentation of Islam and Muslims in the Swedish news media.

Analysis of a series of recently published stories about Islam/Muslims in Swedish newspapers demonstrated recurring features of reporting:

Predominance of stories that put Islam/Muslims in a bad light

association of Islam/Muslims with violence

Implied generalizations about Islam/all Muslims based on selective reporting "Islamic terrorists".

Repeated use of a small stock of adjectives/descriptors of Islam/Muslims "extremist", "homophobic", "anti-Semitic", "anti-West", etc.

Over-reporting of representatives of radical Islamism ("fundamentalists") in Europe, and under-reporting of moderate voices.

Over-reporting of groups like *Hizb al-Tahrîr.*

Stereotyping of Muslim women in relation to the issue of veiling (*hijâb*) presented as a mark of oppression

Uncritical acceptance of the "clash of civilizations" theory that polarizes Islam and the West.

Islam as "undemocratic".

Tendency to treat Muslims as a monolithic ethno-racial group

Stereotyping of Muslims as Arabs

How is this anti-Islam/Muslim bias to be explained?

Media ignorance of Islamic religion and values, and of ethnic and cultural diversity among Muslims.

Monopolistic ownership of media organizations creates convergence of political and economic interests

News-worthiness assessed in commercial terms: stories selling newspapers, rather than informing readers

Media reflect "Islamophobia" of society

What is islamophobia?

Term used by British Runnymede Trust in 1997 report entitled *Islamophobia: a Challenge For Us All* (www.runnymedetrust.org/pu blications/pdfs/islamphobia.pdf).

Defined as:

"The fear and/or hatred of Islam, Muslims or Islamic culture. It can be seen in the belief that all or most Muslims are religious fanatics, have violent tendencies towards non-Muslims, and resist concepts such as equality, tolerance, and democracy as being non-Islamic. Islamophobia is a new form of racism, whereby Muslims as an ethno-religious group, not a race, are nevertheless constructed as a race; and a set of negative assumptions is made of the entire group, to the detriment of members of that group."
See Göran Larsson, Islamofobi i Sverige 2004
(www.intergrationsverket.se/upload/islamofobi.pdf)

A form of discrimination, comparable to Anti-Semitism as Jews. Swedish law guarantees human rights to Muslims as individuals, but offers no protection to Islam as collective identity.

ISLAMIC-CHRISTIAN STUDY CENTRE, COPENHAGEN
(http://www.ikstudiecenter.dk/english_generalinformation.htm)
Lissi Rasmussen, Naveed Baig and Safet Bektovic introduced the work of the Islamic-Christian Study Centre (IKS)

Established in 1996, IKS is a joint venture of Christians and Muslims in Copenhagen. It defines itself as "a kind of refuge, where Muslims and Christians can feel confident and respected and therefore free to openly engage and express themselves." It aims (1) to

improve the conditions of mutual coexistence between people with respectively Muslim and Christian backgrounds by creating possibilities for the personal encounter; (2) to contribute to the solution of some of the problems and conflicts that inevitably arise where people with different cultural backgrounds live together; (3) to constitute a force that contributes to the creation of solidarity and common fundamental values that can resist a fragmentation of our society; (4) to give sober information about Islam and Christianity and the relationship between them and about ethnic minorities in Denmark.

IKS activities include promoting dialogue at national and international levels; consultancy, personal advice and counseling; academic study through lectures, research and library; publications, including a quarterly newsletter.

Lissi explained the principles on which IKS works:
She began by recognizing the difference between the social situations in Denmark, where relations between Muslims and Danish society have been polarized since the 2004 "Muhammad Cartoons" affair, and the situation in Sweden.

In Denmark the urgent need is for "bridge-building", mutual understanding and reconciliation.

It is essential for dialogue between Christians and Muslims to avoid religious "ghettoism", and to include the secular dimension that influences the whole of society, including religious groups.

Dialogue must begin by addressing actual needs in society, and must maintain a practical focus:

IKS uses the term "diapraxis": it is by working together to overcome social problems that people begin to understand each other in new ways

Lissi illustrated this by describing IKS's work with the labour market and hospitals

Naveed spoke about his work as Muslim prison imam.
Accepting that chaplaincy work is not part of traditional imam training in Islamic society, he emphasized the importance of learning new counselling skills for imams in Europe – something that Muslims can learn from the experience of Christian and other professional counsellors

He illustrated this with the example of a Muslim prison chaplain course in Leicester, UK, and multifaith chaplaincy teams

Safet shared his experience in Bosnia and Denmark
Dialogue must always proceed as "dialogue of life" that seeks to build bridges between peoples, and bring reconciliation.
Sufism, that emphasizes the interior (spiritual) and universal dimensions of Islam, has an important role to play in the dialogue of life.

Sarajevo University in Bosnia is a place that combine the study of Islamic religion with the secular disciplines of modern society; this could be a model for a new kind of Islamic study in Denmark.

LEICESTER SEMINAR
23-27 OCTOBER 2006

This 4-day seminar was organized in conjunction with St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in Multi-Faith Society (www.stphilipscentre.co.uk), a national ecumenical training centre for Christians, people of other faiths, and civic partners working for the advancement of Britain's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

The seminar included 18 Swedish members, selected on the basis of their having an ctual or potential strategic role in working against discrimination in Malmö.

The Centre's Director, Andrew Wingate, and his team arranged an intensive programme of meetings with leading figures in the Muslim and Christian communities, and representatives of the Leicester City Council.

It is impossible to give a full summary of the programme in the limited space of this Report. Many of the issues discussed were specific to the UK context. There was no assumption that these could be transferred to Sweden, and it is not necessary to report them. The following review is therefore selective, and focuses on issues relating to multiculturalism in Britain.

WHAT DOES MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY MEAN IN BRITAIN TODAY?

Andrew Wingate raised this question at the very beginning of the seminar.
"Multiculturalism" has been the official policy of the British "New Labour" government since it was elected to power in 1997. The roots of multiculturalism lie in Canada in the 1970s. It was adopted by the European Union, including Sweden (1975). It advocates a society consisting of distinct groups of equal status, and affirms ethnic diversity as a positive force in advancing social cohesion.

"9/11" (2001) and "7/7" (2005) have subjected multiculturalism to vigorous debate in Britain. Does it lead to the cohesion or fragmentation of British society? A MORI poll in 2006 reported that 62% of the British public support multiculturalism, while 58% believe that ethnic minorities must adapt to British culture.

The debate often focuses on Leicester whose population, according to the last national census (2001), was 63% Caucasian and 37% Black/Asian – 45% Christian, 15% Hindu, 11% Muslim, 4% Sikh, 1% other, 24% no religion or religion not stated.

Monica Glover (Leicester City Council) explained how the Council commitment to multiculturalism is expressed through a "community cohesion" policy and fund that develops "cross sectoral partnerships" between the Council and community organizations to tackle inequality, prejudice and discrimination, and produce better services to all. "The energy of our community can be seen in many of Leicester's community and voluntary sector organizations. We must continue to strengthen our multi-cultural and multi-faith city by supporting and promoting healthy community relations, in which different voices can be heard, trust is built, understanding is developed and potential sources of conflict resolved creatively." The Community Cohesion Fund, created in 2004, has a current budget of £100,000 (pounds sterling) to support community based projects for social cohesion.

While recognizing Leicester's achievements as a multi-cultural city, Monica acknowledged that problems exist: for example, "parallel communities" that lack much sense of common citizenship; generation gaps that contribute to social disaffection among young people; poor educational incentive among Asian males; marginalization of women; neglect of poor white areas, and competition for reduced economic resources. Due to "7/7" (2005), and the effects of the Iraq war, multiculturalism has lost its innocence. Social, economic and cultural barriers must be bridged, and multiculturalism must be adapted to a new generation.

Positive examples of "cross-sectoral partnership" include: "twining" of schools with predominantly white and Asian students; promoting multiculturalism in state education, and redressing a "Eurocentric" view of British society and the world.

Rik Basra (Leicestershire Police) spoke about increased Asian recruitment to the police force, and provision of cultural support for Asian police officers; development of a "community-led" approach to policing, building bridges between the police and local community organizations. The cooperation between the police and the Federation of Muslim Organizations (Suleman Nagdi) is effective example of "cross-sectoral partnership."

HOW DO "FAITH COMMUNITIES" CONTRIBUTE TO RENEWING MULTICULTURALISM IN LEICESTER?

The seminar heard much about the activities of the Leicester Council of Faiths (LCF), founded 1986 (www.leicestercounciloffaiths.org.uk). It includes representatives of all the faith communities in Leicester, and is supported by – among others – the Leicester City Council.

In 2004 LCF produced a book report entitled *Embracing the Present, Planning the Future – social action by faith communities in Leicester*. This surveyed the work of 250 faith groups responsible for 450 social projects. While this is evidence of the "social capital" of religious organizations, the report pointed to the urgency of developing wider partnership between faith communities and other organizations, including the City Council. Only 22% of faith-based social projects receive external funding. The report recommends the development of social partnership and joint initiatives between faith communities and criminal justice and health services.

HOW DOES THE ANGLICAN CHURCH (CHURCH OF ENGLAND) CONTRIBUTE TO RENEWING MULTICULTURALISM IN LEICESTER?

Bishop Tim Stevens (Anglican Diocese of Leicester) entertained the seminar at a reception, and spoke about his role as bishop of one of the most multicultural dioceses in England. He explained that, consistent with the theory and practice of the Anglican "parish," the Anglican Church has a responsibility toward everyone living in a parish, not just baptized Anglicans. The same holds true at the level of the diocese. An essential part of his work, as bishop of the diocese, is outreach to the entire population, including the different faith communities. This means cultivating interfaith friendship, understanding and cooperation. It enables the bishop, as representative of the state church, to "represent" the concerns of all faith communities to the government and other statutory bodies.

At the diocesan level (www.leicester.anglican.org) the advancement of multiculturalism is expressed primarily through the offices for social responsibility and education:
Richard Atkinson (Archdeacon) explained that the office of social responsibility includes urban regeneration among its primary responsibilities. The LCF report (above) provides a framework for this work. It shows the energy of religious communities as initiators of social regeneration, often through interfaith collaboration at local levels. Peter Brindle (parish priest) talked about plans for "twinning" a church and a mosque in 2007.

Janet Ingram (Board of Education) explained that the Board of Education is a statutory body, responsible for 98 church schools in the Leicester diocese. These schools include significant percentages of children from ethnic minority and "other faith" communities. Under government regulation, the Board deals with curriculum policy, staffing, religious education (RE), and supports a RE advisor. Policies against racism, and for ethnic and religious diversity specifically aim to strengthen multiculturalism.
The Board also supports Anglican participation in multi-faith chaplaincy work at Leicester's universities and colleges.

How do Muslim organizations contribute to renewing multiculturalism in Leicester?

Suleman Nagdi talked about the role of the Federation of Muslim Organisations in relation to the City Council.

Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra discussed difficulties that Muslims experience with the media. He emphasized that constructive engagement with the press, TV and radio is "the *jihâd* of our times." Muslims must take the initiative in challenging popular misconceptions of Islam: for example, his participation in a national TV debate on the question: "does Islam threaten freedom of speech?" convinced 52% of the studio audience that it does not. His Radio Ramadan programme challenges Muslims to rethink many of their cultural traditions in Britain. But the power of the media is difficult to contest: why do the media concentrate so extensively on the debate about veiled Muslim women, and so little on Muslim views of the British government's Iraq policy?

Tove Noorjaheen Dalenius, a Swedish Muslim woman living in Leicester, talked about her work of promoting multiculturalism in schools, and among Muslim young people in economically poor parts of Leicester: problems that some local politicians attribute to "Islamic fundamentalism", she identifies with drugs, unemployment, and depression.

Ataullah Siddiqi and Dilwar Hussein (Islamic Foundation) talked about the role of the Islamic Foundation (www.islamic-foundation.org.uk), founded in Leicester in 1973. Ataullah explained how interfaith dialogue has become part of the Foundation's work at local, national and international levels. Interfaith dialogue is essential for Islamic self-understanding in Britain. The goal is to find "a European accent for Islam" and to build a multicultural community in which all religious groups can participate freely and equally. While agreeing with this, Dilwar spoke about the degree of disappointment, even alienation, that has set in among British Muslims since "9/11" (2001): while most British Muslim remain committed to multiculturalism, many are asking whether the rest of British society shares this view.

St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in a Multi Faith Society

Andrew Wingate and Shanti Hettiachchi explained the role of the Centre as a national ecumenical training centre for Christians, people of other faiths, and civic partners working for the advancement of Britain's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

The Centre operates with the framework of the British churches ecumenical report *Presence and Engagement: the Churches' Task in a Multi Faith Society* (2003). The report surveys ways in which churches actively support social "diversity" and "cohesion," against "separation" and "segregation." Its recommendations – presented as "opportunities" – emphasize the national churches have much to learn from "neighbourhood ministries" in terms of theological reflection, ecumenical cooperation, clergy training, and the building of long-term national strategies.

Third Malmö seminar: 25 November 2006

The third Malmö seminar was an exercise in reflecting together – the third element of the Nya Nägar methodology – on what the previous seminars had revealed about the challenges of strengthening multiculturalism and overcoming issues of discrimination.

To facilitate this process, we listened to the personal stories of two colleagues: François Nanou, a West African (Ivory Coast) Christian immigrant to Sweden, now living in Lund; and Sughra Ahmed, a Muslim woman born in Britain, now living in Leicester. By sharing their personal experiences of struggling against discrimination, they stimulated other seminar participants to reflect with them on ways in which we can all work at this together.

François Nanou (centre of theology and religious studies, lund university)

François migrated to Sweden in 1992 from his home in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, West Africa. He was brought up in a family that valued education. While still at school he became a Christian, and as a student his interests lay in the social and political studies. Participation in student political action for democracy in Ivory Coast, and desire for educational advancement resulted in his joining the growing numbers of young people that seek educational opportunity in Europe and North America.

François gave a fascinating account of his personal experience of arriving in Sweden, and of his two-year struggle to gain permission to stay (1992-1994). "Discrimination" he said, "is self-evidently part of the experience of every immigrant to Sweden." It is both a subjective experience and an objective reality.

Subjective factors in François' experience included:

- Lack of any knowledge about Sweden prior to his arrival in Stockholm.
- He likened the change of climate to moving from light to darkness, from warmth to coldness.
- Frustration of not being able to communicate, or explain himself.
- The difficulty of having a name that is foreign to Swedish culture.
- The fact of his having black skin.
- The difficulty to penetrating through "the walls" of Swedish society.

Objective factors included:

- The institutional rigidity of the Swedish "system."
- Immigration requirements that made François feel like a prisoner, subject to police scrutiny, and confinement in immigration camps.
- The tendency of immigration authorities to deny requests for residency permits, necessitating extensive legal appeals.
- The slowness of the tax department in issuing the "personal number" without which an immigrant has no official identity.

The University's requirements of official evidence of previous education, even when this is difficult to produce because of administrative problems in countries of origin.

In François' experience it took fully two years to overcome these problems. He found help from churches that he approached in Lund, although he first had to make them aware of the problems that he faced. Since receiving his personal number – his official "welcome to Sweden" – he has been able to establish himself in Lund/Malmö. He speaks fluent Swedish, is married with family, has worked for the Immigration Department, and is currently studying theology with the possibility becoming a priest in the Church of Sweden.

François concluded with a summary of what he had learned in this process: never give up hope; be willing to change and adapt; confront every No with a Yes; find a way around every problem; the importance of friendship.

SUGHRA AHMED (ISLAMIC FOUNDATION, LEICESTER)

Sughra introduced herself as a "British," "Muslim," "woman," insisting that these three elements are essential to her self-identity. It is artificial to separate them or prioritize them.

She shared her experience of being brought up as a Muslim in Britain. As a young person she had a secular education in state schools, and religious education in the context of her family and community. It has been her choice as a young adult to wear traditional Islamic dress including the headscarf, and to study Islamic religion and society at university. As a result she has developed her personal identity as an educated Muslim woman, with a learned as well as hereditary knowledge of Islam, and chooses to express her religious identity through constructive participation in Britain's multicultural and secular society.

Her experience of discrimination comes from two directions:

Within the Muslim community, traditionalists criticize her for being "un-Islamic", and she experiences obstruction from traditional male religious hierarchies.

Within the wider British community, she is criticized for being "too Islamic" because of the way she chooses to dress, and she often feels stereotyped by popular misconceptions of "the oppressed Muslim woman."

Sughra deals with this "double discrimination" by committing herself to a public role as a teacher – both within the Muslim community, and in wider British society. Education, she emphasized, is the best way of overcoming discrimination.

Sughra's educational work with Muslims focuses on the fact that:

50% of British Muslims are under the age of 25.

Muslim males are now among the lowest achievers in British state schools, and among the most vulnerable to drugs and crime in British cities;

Muslim women perform well in school, but are often frustrated in their career choices by traditional assumptions about the role of women in Muslim families (marriage, child birth, etc.)

British Muslims need to develop new interpretations of Islam that can engage multi-cultural, secular society – distinguishing between permanent Islamic beliefs and values, and Muslim culture that is always changing.

Sughra cited her work with a group known as "Women of Faith" that helps Muslim women to develop their self-identity in contemporary British Muslim society.

Sughra's educational work with the wider community is mainly concerned with addressing popular stereotypical views of Islam, especially of Muslim women.

She illustrated the challenge by inviting seminar participants to "own up" to their assumptions about Muslim women: e.g. Muslim women are oppressed, powerless; uneducated; subject to marriage rules that privilege men and deprive women of choice of spouse, and ability to divorce; confined to their homes; isolated; segregated; excluded; educated women can't find husbands.

Accepting that such stereotypes have some accuracy in terms of traditional Muslim culture, she argued that they have no foundation in the Qur'an; and that different ways of interpreting the Qur'an result in different understandings of gender relationships, marriage and divorce, etc.

REFLECTIONS ON DISCRIMINATION AND WAYS OF OVERCOMING IT.

The following points emerged from small group discussions.

What is discrimination?

Discrimination means the unfair (whether illegal or within the law) treatment of individuals or groups on the basis of prejudice against their race, gender, ethnicity, or religion. Discrimination is an abuse of power, normally by a majority group and against a minority group, but also by traditional power holders against other groups regardless of size.

Discrimination falls into two kinds:

Direct discrimination that unfairly treats individuals or groups by breaking laws that protect them;

Indirect discrimination that unfairly treats individuals of groups without breaking laws, but with the tacit or public support of majority groups.

Direct discrimination can be identified in relation to existing laws; indirect discrimination is difficult to identify by legal criteria, and therefore the experience of the victim of discrimination must be accepted as reality – as accepted in issues of racism, sexual harassment, etc.

Indirect discrimination can be experienced by its victims at individual, group, and institutional levels.

How to overcome discrimination?
Direct discrimination is dealt with through legal process.

Swedish law, in common with other European legal systems, invests rights in individuals rather than groups. The communal identity of Muslims is not subject to legal protections.

Indirect discrimination has to be dealt with at the level of individual and collective culture.

Because indirect discrimination is identified by subjective experience, it often falls to the victim of discrimination to confront it, and to initiate change.

It is essential that perpetrators of indirect discrimination are made aware of the problem, and redress it.

Together, discriminators and discriminated, can redress issues of public culture that tolerate indirect discrimination.

Education is an essential path to affirming "the otherness of the other," and to strengthening the common sense of individual and group values that are essential for community coherence.

Role of religious organizations
Religions frequently discriminate against each other, and against secular groups. This is a sociological tendency of exclusive truth claims. Christians and Muslim communities are particularly prone to perpetrating such discrimination.

Contemporary multiculturalism challenges religions to affirm the universal aspects of their ethical and spiritual values.

Dialogue among religions, and between religions and secular groups, is a way of overcoming discriminatory tendencies, and strengthening social cohesion.

FOURTH MALMÖ SEMINAR: 9 DECEMBER 2006

The aim of the fourth and final Malmö seminar was to further the process of participant reflection, widening it to include reflection on what been learned from all the Nya Vägar Seminars, and suggestions of future action.

Andrew Wingate (St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in Multi-Faith Society, Leicester) shared in this process.

REFLECTION ON THE MALMÖ SEMINARS

Anna Leuchars (Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University) opened the reflections by sharing the main things that she had learned from the Malmö seminars:

One of the main achievements of the seminars has been to understand the experiences of Muslims in Malmö. Muslim participants were effective in sharing their understandings of what Islam actually is, against popular misrepresentations. Muslims experience Islamophobia as a real form of discrimination both against individuals and their community.

We met, and heard about young Muslims who are struggling against this form of discrimination. These people represent important role models for all who desire to enhance Sweden's multi-cultural society.

The seminars exposed the gender dimension of discrimination. Muslim women often bear the burden of negative stereotyping of Islam – both from non-Muslims and within the Muslim community. This also challenges Christians to face up to gender discrimination in their own religious organizations.

The seminars revealed that discrimination in Malmö is also experienced by Christian immigrants. François Nanou's story of his struggle to settle in Malmö/Lund pointed to the racial element of discrimination.

The seminars helped us see that both religions – Islam and Christianity – have strong commitments to building a just community. Both have rich traditions of social teaching. These offer a basis for shared reflection and common action.

The examples of effective Christian-Muslim cooperation that we saw, both in Malmö and Leicester, show that it is best to begin by acting on local opportunities, addressing specific needs. Dialogue starts at the microcosmic level. Education is also very important.

The seminars raised the question: is it possible to create a forum where these issues can continue to be discussed? This could contribute to youth education,

the training of priests and imams, and to advancing the conversation between religious and secular organizations.

Anna ended by saying the issues raised in the seminars challenged her to search deeply within herself, her own self-identity and self-awareness. The challenge of struggling with such personal crisis is necessary if we are really to open ourselves to other people, to their ways of thinking and feeling, and meet each other at interior as well as exterior levels. This can be exciting and inspiring.

REFLECTION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF THE LEICESTER SEMINAR

Jenny Hasslert (Swedish Islamic Support) and Håkan Noren (Centre of Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University) summarized some of the written reflections by participants in the Leicester seminar.

Jenny made the following points on the nature of the dialogue experience:

It was very important that we were able, as a group of Muslims and Christians, to spend an intensive week together, opening ourselves to new experiences, and learning about each other, and about ourselves, in the process.

We began to see how, for each of us, religion is part of life – not just beliefs, but personal culture, conduct and outlook. Simple things like greetings are very important.

We learned that friendship is an essential basis for inter-religious dialogue. Inter-religious dialogue is about building friendships between people of faith, across religious divisions.

Inter-religious dialogue helps us understand each other, but it also gives us a new understanding of ourselves, and of the prejudices that are hidden deeply in us all. Unless we are honest about ourselves, we can't build honest friendships with others.

The shared experience of the Leicester seminar was so intense that we needed more time to reflect on it together. Inter-religious dialogue is more that gathering information. We needed to spend more time in sharing and exploring our experiences.

While the focus on dialogue between religions is important, we must take care not to allow this to obscure the reality that we are also in dialogue with secular people. In our European societies it is artificial to separate these two aspects of dialogue. All of us are both religious and secular, and inter-religious dialogue must deal with this whole complexity.
While various kinds of secularism reject the faith-stance of religions, secularity – in the sense of affirming the value of human reasoning – can be a constructive challenge for religions, and influences the character of dialogue.

Religious people often find it difficult to be honestly self-critical. Dialogue teaches us that such honesty is essential, but to achieve it we must rely on our faith and the inner spiritual resources that this creates.

Håkan focused on ideas for action that emerged from the Leicester seminar:

Leicester and Malmö present us with very different contexts of dialogue between Muslims, Christians and secular groups, and different approaches to multiculturalism. Neither context represents a model for the other. But there are important things that we can learn from each other.

What we have learned of the dialogue process could be configured as follows:
A = religious organizations (Islamic and Christian)
Each serves its own community.

B = religious organizations in dialogue
Dialogue of life, cooperation in the struggle against discrimination, etc.
Shared reflection (A <> B).

C = secular, statutory organizations
Dialogue on the secular level (A+B <> C).

We learned that the A <> B dimension of dialogue often begins at local levels, around local issues.

Examples: mother-and-baby groups, religious education, religious/cultural festivals.

The model of a "Council of Faiths", made up of all the religious organizations in a city, puts the A <> B on a more permanent, visible level, and provides a forum in which dialogue can be developed among religions and secular organizations (A+B <> C).

An urgent area for inter-religious cooperation is engaging the media, to correct misrepresentation of religions, especially Islam, and to develop resources for constructive improvement.

Sport/recreational activities provide a good forum for building relationships.

REFLECTIONS OF THE PARTNERS THAT ORGANIZED THE SEMINARS

Kirseberg Parish
(www.kirsebergskyrkan.nu)
Per Håkansson drew attention to the recently published book, *Oväntad Glänta*, that gathers stories of people involved in inter-religious encounter in Malmö. It includes the story of an Iranian immigrant who works in Kirseberg church. In light of the Nya Vägar Seminars, Per wants to develop friendships between young Christians and Muslims in Kirseberg, including a residential week together. The various churches in Malmö need to find ways of gathering and sharing their experience of inter-religious dialogue.

Malmö City Mission
(www.stadsmissionen.nu)
Johannes Jorgensen emphasized the importance of inter-religious prayer. This is a dimension of inter-religious dialogue that has not been addressed in the Nya Vägar seminars. He shared his own experience of praying with Muslims in Rosengård, and of how spiritually enriching this was. Another area that has not been addressed is homelessness. The City Mission is dealing with increasing numbers of homeless immigrants. Tensions between homeless people are often severe. This is a concrete problem that requires a lot of work.

Swedish Islamic Support
Emerick Adolffson used the image of a pyramid to remind us that the higher our ambitions, the greater our need to widen the base on which we stand. The Nya Vägar Seminars mark a beginning, and have given us a sense of the many things that need to be done. Progress toward these goals requires that we attract more support within our respective communities. SIS wants to draw together more Muslims organizations. One of its priorities is to work with the health services, especially the nursing profession.

Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University
(www.teol.lu.se)
David Kerr emphasized the importance of the Nya Vägar seminars for CTR's work in Mission and Ecumenical Studies. Christian mission today is mainly exercised through inter-religious dialogue, and ecumenism seeks to build a multicultural world in which religions cooperate together, rather than competing against each other. These seminars help to root this work in Malmö. CTR has resources that can help Christians and Muslims in the process of reflection, and in disseminating the theory and practice of inter-religious dialogue.

REFLECTIONS FROM LEICESTER

As part of the final Malmö seminar, Andrew Wingate, director of St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in Multi-Faith Society, offered some reflections on what he had seen and heard through his participation in the Nya Vägar Seminars.

1) Enthusiasm
Andrew commented first on the enthusiasm of the seminar participants – an intensity of interest and commitment that is inspiring. He had seen the participants grow together as a group since the first Malmö seminar, and he felt a strong personal interaction especially with those who participated in the Leicester seminar. He brought warm greetings from his Muslim and Christian colleagues in Leicester.

2) The value of cross-contextual learning
Andrew acknowledged that the contexts of Malmö and Leicester are rather different, even though many issues that we are dealing with are similar. His visits to Malmö sharpened his awareness of two aspects of the Swedish context:

The ethnic diversity among Muslims in Malmö is greater than in Leicester, and resembles the situation in London. This problematizes treating Muslims as a single homogenous community. Few generalizations hold true in actual reality.

The secular distinction between religion and state seems to be more accentuated in Sweden than in England, and may be more widely accepted as the foundation and framework for inter-religious dialogue. Does it also have the effect of making partnership between religious and secular organizations – and between government and religiously-defined communities – more difficult?

3) Education
On the basis of his experience in Leicester, Andrew endorsed the priority of education that has emerged from the Malmö seminars. Education has always been a central element of Christian and Muslim social outreach – and is key to joint Muslim/Christian "striving – *jihâd*."

Education must include training. He endorsed five areas of education/training that the seminars emphasized:
(1) Young people; (2) adults; (3) professional groups (e.g. nurses, social workers); (4) religious leaders (clergy, imams); and (5) women

He recommended the model of the Intercultural Communication and Leadership School (http://www.intercivilization.net) as a possible way forward

4) Council of faiths
The idea of a "council of faiths", including Christian, Muslim and other religious groups,

has worked very well in Leicester, and could play a valuable role in Malmö. Its success in Leicester is due to the careful way in which it was built up, as a network, with the full consultation, participation and representation of its member groups.

5) Dimensions of dialogue
Recalling the four dimensions of dialogue that were outlined in the first Malmö seminar, Andrew characterized the focus of the seminars being the "dialogue of life" and "dialogue of actions." He encouraged us to find appropriate ways of exploring the "dialogue of words", and "dialogue of the heart/spirit."

REFLECTIONS FROM THE MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN CONSULTANTS

SAFET BEKTOVIC

Safet Bektovic is a Muslim scholar from Bosnia, trained in Sarajevo, and now resident in Denmark where he works with the Islamic-Christian Study Centre, Copenhagen. He participated in the Malmö and Leicester seminars. He reflects, as a Muslim religious thinker, on some of the wider issues that the seminars raised.

1) Religion and secular pluralist society.
Cultural diversities are not a novelty. They are as old as humanity itself. The history of human civilization can be read as a history of exchanges between cultures. No civilisation or culture has existed in an isolated manner, without borrowing from others. The Islamic and the Western world have interacted in many fields and in many ways, from the middle ages to modern times.

Immigrations from Asia and Africa in the 60s and 70s have actualised cultural and religious pluralism in the Western Europe. Cultural encounters have intensified interactions between different groups, and drawn attention to religion. Religion has emerged from the private sphere, and is again an important factor in cultural and social life.

One of the key questions to Muslims immigrants in Europe is how to engage the reality of religious and cultural pluralism in secular society. What does Islam teah in this respect?

The Qur'an tells us that diversity is willed by God. Two verses are especially important in this regard:

> *"O humankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other" (49:13);"*
>
> *"If God had willed, God would have made you a single people, but God's plan is to test you in what God had given you: so strive as in a race in all virtues." (5:55)*

The question is how to understand God's intention? What does it practically mean in our everyday lives? How to be faithful to our religious identity, while t the same time being open to others? The answers are not easy. But the Qur'an is quite clear: accepting diversity doesn't mean giving up one's religion. It challenges us to find new understandings/interpretations of religion. The secularity of European societies liberates Muslims to explore this challenge in new ways.

2)Secularity and universalism
Secularity must not be confused with secularism. Secularity affirms religious neutrality as the basis of pluralist society. Secularity is not *a priori* anti-religious, but affirms that there are proper distinctions between religion and society. Secularity creates a neutral framework for the coexistence of different world views. Secularism, on the other hand, is an ideology, and certain types of secularism are opposed to religion(s).

Secular culture encourages Muslims to rethink Islam in new ways. A leading Muslim intellectual in Europe, Tariq Ramadan, argues that there is no contradiction between being faithful to Islamic principles and being an engaged citizen in a secular society. He describes the Muslim situation in Europe as a "house of witness" (*Dâr ash-Shahâda*)

As part of this process I want to stress the importance of "universalization" as we rethink religion in a secular culture. In terms of Islam this takes us back to the universal principles of the Qur'an and Islamic philosophy – e.g. gender equality, social and economic justice. These give Muslims the basis on which to critique Muslim traditionalism and localism, and overcome ethnically-specific interpretations and practices. As a universal philosophical-theological view, Islam transcends and bridges local forms between Arabs and Turks, Pakistani and Bosnians, between European converts to Islam and inborn Muslims. I believe that a universal inclusive understanding of Islam can contribute to renewing Muslim self-identity in Europe as constructive participants in European secular pluralism.

It is along these lines that I would encourage our Malmö seminars to give greater thought in future to the nature of the society that we seek to promote in our joint "striving– *jihâd*."

3) Inter-religious dialogue
In my experience inter-religious dialogue helps religions to redefine themselves in secular pluralistic society. But we have to be clear about our goals.

Dialogue usually begins – as illustrated by our Malmö seminars – with sharing knowledge about our respective religions, and building confidence in the religious diversity. Of course this is important. But we have to go further than this if we are to achieve the goal of coexistence. Dialogue partners need to focus the resources of their respective religions on dealing with common social problems. To do this, we have to learn to differentiate between culture and religion, and to enlarge the horizon of understanding of ethical and political principles for the common society.

Inter-religious dialogue is difficult if the partners adopt a position of particularism. That is to say if they only care about the concerns of their own group, but do not take into consideration the concerns of the others. Dialogue is easier if the interlocutors adopt some form of inclusivism – accepting that people of other faiths may also have a way to salvation, even though the fullness of salvation can be achieved only in one's own religion.

This comes back to my earlier point about universalism. Dialogue is not about defending the particular truth claims of different religions. These will probably always contradict each other – as, for example, contradictory Muslim and Christians beliefs in the nature of God, the person of Jesus, etc. Dialogue doesn't require us to relativize these differences. Rather, it challenges us to respect them, and at the same time to explore the universal ethical and spiritual values that lie within these beliefs. Dialogue challenges us to respect particularities of belief, without being confined by them.

The goal of Muslim-Christian dialogue, therefore, should be to help Muslims and Christians to express their faith in an open way that engages the pluralism of our contemporary culture and society. It means to have different religious backgrounds and identities, but to belong to the same society. In the current context it has to do with understanding citizenship as a "binding" category.

4) Inter-culturalism
In my experience Muslim immigrants in Scandinavia are in the process of redefining three central aspects of their identity: ethnic origin, religious background, and belonging to Scandinavian society. Social philosophies of multiculturalism are different in Denmark and Sweden. But to my way of thinking, neither cultural assimilation nor religious isolation is the solution.

I will rather talk about inter-culturalism. This means the permanent inter-action of religious and secular groups. It aims to reveal common elements between cultures and religions, while respecting elements that differentiate them from each other. It creates a new social reality – one of belonging together, integrating universal as well as particular aspects, and engaging them – actively and reflectively – in dialogue.

DAVID KERR
David Kerr is Professor of Mission and Ecumenical Studies in the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University. He specialises in Christian-Muslim studies, and has experience of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Europe, North America, Africa and Asia. Although he was one of the principal organisers of the Nya Vägar Seminars, his reflections are his own – no more, no less.

1) Walking together
We set ourselves that goal of "Striving – *jihâd* – against social exclusion: New Ways of tackling discrimination through cooperation among Christians, Muslims, and other organizations." It was ambitious. In relation to the enormity of the task, what have we achieved? Much talk, but what do we have to show for it?

The important thing is that we made a beginning. We took the first steps. Over the four months of the Nya Vägar Seminars we evolved from being strangers to becoming friends – Muslims, Christians, and others whose humanitarian commitments derive from secular more than religious values.

We learned to walk together. This in itself is a huge achievement. Being confined to a wheelchair, I often think of the joy of walking, the pleasure of walking with others. So I feel that we have achieved a great deal, simply by learning to walk together; to walk with a common purpose, toward a shared goal. We challenged discrimination in its basic meaning – to separate people by emphasizing their differences.

2) Hybrid identity
As the shared experience of the Nya Vägar Seminars moulded us into a community, we discovered each other as individual persons. The labels with which we started – "Muslims," "Christians," "secularists" – were left aside as we came to know each other by personal names.

We quickly realised that generalisations about people are artificial. "The Muslim community" is no more a reality than "the Christian community." It is equally misleading to generalise about "religious" and "secular" worldviews. We mix, or blend many different influences in our lives.

What is true of individuals is also true of social groups. The 50,000 Muslims in Malmö include people from at least 90 different national backgrounds. Ethnic, cultural, social, linguistic variety makes them an extremely complex part of the wider Malmö community. Is it surprising that diversity characterises their religious identity, and their interactions with secular life in Malmö? François Nanou's story (p15) reminds us that similar diversity is growing among Christians.

One of the features of our new era of "globalization" is the movement of peoples from one part of the world to another. Hybrid identities have become part of our societies. As hybridization produces beautiful new plants, we saw that it can also stimulate social enrichment.

3) Faith and plurality
The ethnic and religious plurality of contemporary Europe confronts us with new questions of religious self-understanding. Christianity's centuries-long history as the dominant religion in most parts of Europe – historic "Christendom" – makes it difficult for European Christians to agree how to answer these questions. Historically we have often oppressed and persecuted other religions – with tragic consequences in the case of the Jews.

But if we re-read the Bible in the context of religious plurality, it gives us many helpful perspectives. God created all human beings in God's own image. The covenants, or promise-based relationships, that God created with Noah and Abraham included all human beings. The Hebrew Scriptures give us examples of wise understandings of God outside Israel – for example, "the wisdom of Job" has become proverbial. Jesus acknowledged the true faith of a Syrian woman, and told the story of "the good Samaritan" to illustrate true qualities of goodness. The Apostle Peter – founder of the Church – learned that "God has no favourites, but accepts those who fear him, and do what is right, in all nations." (Acts 10:34).

These universal perspectives of the Bible give no grounds for discrimination on the basis of faith, or religion. Rather, they challenge us to see the ethic and religious plurality of contemporary Europe as an opportunity – to explore the meaning of Jesus' command "to love God and love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39) when our neighbours are people of other faiths, or none.

4) Do not bear false witness against your neighbour (Exodus 20:16)
One of the most serious aspects of discrimination that surfaced in the Nya Vägar Seminars is Islamophobia – the popular fear of Islam, resulting in negative stereotyping of all Muslims, and verbal and physical attacks on them. The burning of the Malmö mosque, and the attempted arson against the new building, are reminders that Islamophobia is virulent form of discrimination in our own community.

Islamophobia, like anti-Semitism, is a cesspit of negative stereotypes. It is what the Bible condemns as "false witness." Christians are often guilty of this form of discrimination, and it is important to root it out – especially as the church exercises its teaching role through preaching, education, confirmation, etc.

5) Interior dialogue
The Nya Vägar Seminars rightly focused on the "dialogue of life." But at many points of our discussions, participants recognised that we all need to examine ourselves within. Our own motives are rarely pure. We often harbour secret discriminations. Ambiguous interior intentions contradict what we say in public. In order to root out discrimination in our public discourse, we must root it out in our inner selves.

It is instructive, in this connection, that the word "dialogue" is several times used in the Greek New Testament with the meaning "to ponder in the heart", or "to think to oneself." The "dialogue of life" – and whatever we do or say in the "dialogue of deeds" and the "dialogue of words" – must be matched by an internal "dialogue of the heart." Only then can we speak and act with integrity.

6) Striving together
"Striving" is a mark of faith in the New Testament as well as the Qur'an. Jesus spoke about "striving to enter the narrow gate" (Luke 13:24;) Paul urges us to "strive in prayer" (Romans 15:30;) Timothy likens the life of faith to the striving of an athlete (2 Timothy 2:5.) So "striving" is something that Muslims and Christians value in their respective traditions of faith. The question arises: can we cooperate in the "striving" that our religions demand, and "strive" together for the good of the society we share?

On the basis of our Nya Vägar Seminars I believe we can say Yes. It is essential that we now carry this Yes forward, and work together in practical ways to counter discrimination and exclusion in our multicultural community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nya Vägar Seminars concluded with a strong consensus among participants that the process begun in Malmö/Lund – with active and helpful contributions from colleagues in Copenhagen and Leicester – must continue. Participants broadly agreed that the future development of the "Nya Vägar Process" should include seven elements – presented here as recommendations.

1) Strengthening and widening existing friendships
New friendships – especially friendships across ethnic, cultural and religious groups – have been an enriching experience for all participants. The seminars frequently emphasised that friendship is the basis for dialogue, and for the struggle against discrimination. We must continue to nurture existing friendships, and widen the circle of friends. Social activities, sporting events, sharing in cultural and religious festivals are ways of doing this.

2) Developing a permanent network
Appropriate institutional ways of building relationships across ethnic, cultural and

religious groups need to be developed. Suggestions include the formation of a dialogue forum, a council of faiths – even the purchase of house that would be developed as a meeting place. The experiences of colleagues in Copenhagen and Leicester indicate that networks must be built "from the bottom up."

3) Dissemination through of education
Education has repeatedly emerged as a priority. This must include teenagers, young adults, and older people. Existing educational activities in Christian and Muslim organisations could be expanded to include inter-religious dialogue. For example, confirmation groups could invite some Muslim speakers. The model of the Intercultural Communication and Leadership School (http://www.intercivilization.net) merits consideration as way forward, especially for young adults.

4) Ensuring that women are central to the process
Muslim and Christian women played a central role in planning and running the Nya Vägar Seminars. It is essential that the Nya Vägar Process should continue in this manner. Initiatives can be taken that widen the participation of women – for example, the creation of multi-cultural, inter-religious "mother-and-baby" groups.

5) Widening the dialogue between religious and secular organisations
While the importance of dialogue between religious and secular organisations in the struggle against discrimination was repeatedly affirmed in the Nya Vägar Seminars, it proved difficult to achieve. The continuing Nya Vägar Process must address this challenge. One way forward is to build on contacts that have been established with secular media organisations.

6) Further reflection and study
The Centre of Theology and Religious Studies, Lund University should be encouraged to continue to deal with issues relating to the Nya Vägar Process through its Mission and Ecumenical Studies Seminar, in cooperation with other faculties (social sciences, political sciences), the Islamic-Christian Study Centre, Copenhagen, and St Philip's Centre for Study and Engagement in Multi-Faith Society, Leicester.

7) New funding
Applications for new funding from EU sources should bear these recommendations in mind as proposals are formulated for the continuing Nya Vägar Process.

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