

XIX. International Seminar of the North-South Dialogue Programme " Religions as forms of life and thought ".

REPORT

The question of the contribution of religions and spirituality traditions to justice and knowledge in the world today was the focus of the XIX. International Seminar of the North-South Dialogue Programme, which took place in Aachen from 13-16 November 2019 and was organised by the ISIS Institute in cooperation with the Missiology Institute Missio e.V. and the Institute for Catholic Theology at RWTH Aachen University. This dialogue series, which has been in existence for 30 years, is an initiative in the development of which institutional cooperation partners from the field of international scientific and project-related cooperation have played a significant role, as was demonstrated during the opening of the seminar at RWTH by Patrick Becker (RWTH), Dir. Harald Suermann (MWI) and Raúl Fonet-Betancourt (ISIS Institute). In this context, the initiator and coordinator of the dialogue programme addressed special thanks to the MWI and Misereor for their commitment as cooperation partners and their generous funding with which they supported this dialogue series and made the work of this XIX seminar possible. Last but not least, the city of Aachen as the originating and coordinating centre of the North-South dialogue programme should also be mentioned in this context. This connection to the city of Aachen was renewed at the reception of the seminar participants in the city's town hall, followed by a guided tour (Alexander Lohe) and a narrative review of the development of the dialogue programme (Hans Schelkshorn, Austria), and deepened in the exchange on promoting good coexistence in plural societies today.

With the theme "Religions as Forms of Living and Thinking", this seminar continued the debate on "Justice, Cognition and Spirituality", which was identified as a longer-term focus of work at the XVII Seminar in Chiapas in 2014. The XVIII Seminar 2017 in Seville had elaborated a new understanding of spirituality in the sense of an "option starting from life and for life" and brought the ethical-political task of religions to the fore. Therefore, the main concern of this XIXth seminar was to examine the social mission of religions more closely and to sound out perspectives for this task in an intercontinental exchange.

Important impulses for this joint work were given in the first part of the seminar with three main lectures, which deepened the concern of this seminar from an intercultural-philosophical (Raúl Fonet-Betancourt, Cuba/Aachen), a religio-philosophical-hermeneutical (Carla Canullo, Italy) and a fundamental-theological (Felix Wilfred, India) point of view and stimulated the analysis of the social function of religions on the basis of their determination of the relationship

to freedom, time and identity. This task should be approached in an intercontinental exchange where the different religions and spirituality traditions of humanity come into conversation with each other.

The XIX Seminar provided an outstanding forum for this task, with speakers from Africa and the Middle East, Asia, Latin America and Europe participating by illuminating the societal relevance of religions and spirituality traditions, each from their internal perspective, and identifying specific ways in which they can contribute to justice and knowledge in the world today. A broad spectrum of religions as forms of life and thought were discussed: Islam (Heydar Shadi, Iran/Germany), Judaism (Olaf Glöckner, Germany), Christianity (Michelle Becka, Germany), Buddhism (Kwang-sun Joo, South Korea), indigenous religions in Latin America and Africa (Angela Cristina Borges, Brazil; Birgit Weiler, Peru/Germany; Georgette Ndour, Senegal; Serge Goughémon, Benin/France).

The presentations stimulated in-depth reflection and exchange. (Moderation of the fifth section: Josef Estermann and Birgit Weiler). From this debate, the contribution of international experts who participated in the seminar as guests (Antoine Guy D'Oliveira, Benin; Carlos Mendoza Álvarez, Mexico; Martin Kirschner, Germany; Mauricio Urrea, Mexico; Lorena Zuchel, Chile) should be highlighted. They deepened the question of the social mission of religions against the background of contextual challenges in order to show ways for this common task.

Looking back on this XIX Seminar, which commemorated the murder of the Jesuits in El Salvador 30 years ago with an act of remembrance (Martin Maier SJ, Belgium), it is clear that this intercontinental exchange developed a new understanding of the social mission of religions and led to a remeasurement and intercultural deepening of this task. For this, the connection between spirituality, knowledge and justice offered a fundamental perspective, as the work at this seminar showed. For it enabled the reorientation of religions as forms of life and thought towards their social mission in time as a central contribution to justice and knowledge in the world today.

The next seminar in this dialogue series will further develop this line of work in order to examine more closely the connection between spirituality, knowledge and justice as a perspective for an intercultural and interreligious renewal of social coexistence and to test it in an intercontinental exchange.

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