



**Protestantse
Kerk**

Determination of position Islam memorandum

General Synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, April 2013

The general synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN) once and again has engaged in issues the church faces with reference to the presence of a considerable number of Muslims in Dutch society. In this process the PCN has been in touch with fellow Christians and with organizations representing Muslims and Jews in order to learn from experiences gained in the Netherlands and in other parts of the world.

Christians come across Muslims in everyday life. This happens both in the neighborhood and at work, in school and on the soccer field. These chance encounters color their lives. They however evoke questions as well. Questions with regard to their own identity and other vital issues of life, and to topical issues in our society. The church really wants to engage in these questions. While doing this the church with all due deference endeavors to define its position in the present context. On its way the community of Christ pauses at certain moments to reflect on the current position: where are we at this moment, where did we come from and where shall we go? Considering the questions the church faces because of the Islam is such a moment of reflection; from here we continue the journey and the conversation is resumed along the way.

In the current pluralistic context the basic principles for determining our position are integrity and respect. Integrity does imply that the church engages in these questions starting from its own identity as a Christian community. All the same the church respects the integrity of Muslims being from their own tradition present in Dutch society.

Respect and integrity with regard to Islam implies for the PCN:

1. First of all the church pays heed to the complex history of the interrelationship of Muslims and Christians. This history has its positive and its negative experiences. Those experiences with at times intense emotions also qualify the way we think about others and how we look at them. The church is aware of this and really wants to engage in this. Nevertheless the church does not allow itself to be determined by negative experiences. The church intends to look respectfully for ways to proceed with Muslims on a journey of renewal in our society today.
2. The church respects the singular character of the Islamic community. The church acknowledges that within the framework of an united Islam Muslims shape and express their faith in all diversity and that they relate to Dutch society in different ways. It is beyond the competence of the church to determine which shape of Islam should be characterized as the one and authentic expression of faith. The discussion about this first of all belongs within the Muslim community. The church engages in encountering this community in all its diversity and does not a priori exclude any factions. In order to enable relationships prudence in judging others is called for.
3. Furthermore it needs to be determined that the question whether we believe in the same God is not the principal question to be addressed in our discussion. According to the Christian and the Islamic tradition there is one God, the God who called Abraham to serve Him alone and to abandon all idols. The question: who is the God whom we confess?, is more pertinent. This is an issue in the internal faith discussion in the church as well. People quite easily make idols or images of the one God for themselves, and they must return to the essence and to wondering who the One God for them truly is. The discussion with other people is a sine qua non in this.
4. Integrity however implies for the church as well that we look at Islam from the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ is the foundation and the keystone of the Christian community. According to the confession of the church God has revealed Himself in Jesus decisively. Even though Islam and Christianity both consider themselves to be going back to the same history of God with humankind, more than cosmetic differences between Christianity and Islam exist about the manner in which God engages human beings, about who God is and how He reveals Himself.

5. Integrity implies for the church introspection and reflection. In this reflection the church does not limit itself to repeating of what always has been said, but the church intends to demonstrate willingness to consider fundamental questions once again. Questions like: who are we truly as a protestant church, and what is the essence of what the church faithfully professes today? What is the deepest calling and inspiration of the church itself? This reflection moreover regards the history of the faith of the church: how has the church presented itself towards Muslims? What impression did the church leave behind with regard to Jesus Christ? And with what kind of political and social mainstreams did the church identify itself?
6. The church is aware of its role regarding the image of Muslims in society and its calling to expose prejudices and stereotypes. Coming from respectful relationships and trust mutual existing concerns must be heard and shared. Only this approach offers opportunities to really challenge stereotypes and prejudices.
7. Respect for Islam implies as well that the church is willing to accept its calling to enter discussions about the manner in which values and customs that are important for many Muslims relate to values and customs that – resulting from an age-long dominant Christian tradition in the Netherlands – came to belong to the core values of Dutch society, like religious and personal freedom and tolerance.
8. The church expresses its concern with respect to all people, Christians, Muslims and other believers, that are being persecuted because of their religion. The church obviously involves itself intensively with Christian minorities and Christians from Muslim origin in Islamic contexts, particularly wherever they suffer from disenfranchisement, discrimination and persecution. The rapid and unpredictable changes in a number of Islamic countries lead one time to hope in the church and its members, another time however developments cause concern.
9. The church wants to recognize the implications of being a Muslim in Dutch society: the experience of not being appreciated in the willingness to contribute to society and of being identified with negative expressions of Islam elsewhere can become a blockade. The church in its resisting of religious persecution and of false mutual representations, in its ministry to all people suffering from injustice and violence in this world, looks for relationships with Muslims committed likewise to law and justice.
10. The memorandum now under discussion (Integrity and Respect) does not replace a memorandum about Israel and Palestinians (IP memorandum 2008) accepted previously by Synod. The solidarity with the people of Israel remains unrelinquishable for the church. Wherever this causes questions for Muslims, the church really engages in those questions and wants to be explicitly answerable for what is stated in the IP-memorandum.
11. The church expresses its gratitude for the manner in which Christians both at the local level and at wider levels commit themselves to discussions with Muslims and with representatives from other religious traditions, and encourages new initiatives in this. The church continues its cordial cooperation in the formal dialogue with Muslims and other believers, shaped in the Council of Churches in the Netherlands and in the World Council of Churches.
12. The church expresses itself in society in ministry and love, witness, prayer and looking for cooperation with Muslims in the social sphere. The church does so from its integrity and with regard for the other person. At the diaconal level there are good opportunities for cooperation from shared values. The church acknowledges in this respect that secularization in particular is a subject of concern for Muslims. This offers opportunities for jointly looking for the consequences of secularization for the faith communities and for seeking ways to be present in secularized society in an inspiring manner. For Christians and Muslims the place of faith in the public domain is an important issue.