



Freedom of religion as a human right in Christianity and Islam

The regional group “Conference of the Churches on the Rhine” (CCR) of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) issued a declaration in Strasbourg on 4 May on freedom of religion, freedom to change religion and the ideological neutrality of the state.

The Third General Assembly of the regional group “Conference of the Churches on the Rhine” (CCR) of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) ended on 4 May with a declaration on “Freedom of religion as a human right in Christianity and Islam”. The declaration states that against the background of increasing cultural and religious diversity in Europe freedom of religion is of central importance as a basis for the churches. This also includes a guarantee from the state of the right to change religion and ideological convictions.

The CCR emphasizes the ideological neutrality of the democratic state, which may no more take over the task of religious communities than the religious communities may take over the functions of state organs. The state must also guarantee the implementation of the human right to freedom of religion by “allowing the building and use of worthy and appropriate places of worship,” the declaration goes on. The CCR emphasized the need to take further the dialogue between Christianity and Islam on the understanding of human rights and their foundation. In the case of a change of religion religious communities “must not threaten any consequences which violate human rights or human dignity”.

Beforehand three addresses on “Freedom of religion as a human right” were given from Christian (Prof. Jörg Winter, University of Heidelberg), Islamic (Dr. Mohammed Amin Al-Midani, University of Strasbourg) and European (Merete Bjerregaard, European Court of Justice for Human Rights) perspectives. Winter stressed that the universality of interreligious dialogue must be the universality of human rights: “It would be good if the intersection between Christianity and Islam is greater than the two sides think.”

Note: the declaration of the Conference of the Churches on the Rhine can be downloaded in German language at www.leuenberg.eu.

At present the Conference of the Churches on the Rhine, which has existed since 1961, brings together 13 churches from Germany, France, the Principality of Liechtenstein, Austria and Switzerland. Since 2007 the CCR has been a regional group of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE). The coming 4th General Assembly of the CCR will take place in Strasbourg on 3 May 2010.