Exposure Programme »Islam in Rome«
24-28.6.1988

Participants from Finland, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, New Zealand, Norway, U.K. and Canada made up a core group with additional participants from the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (PISAI).

The programme was arranged by Fr. A. Garon of Pisai and was varied and interesting. His work was accomplished under the constraints of the limitations imposed on him by the nature of the Muslim community in Italy and his responsibilities as director of PISAI.

The programme included visits to the new mosque and Islamic Centre under construction, the S. Egidio community, the Secretariat for non-Christians, the Vatican Library etc. There were also discussion sessions with Fr. M. Borrmanns of PISAI, the Director of the Islamic Centre in Rome, Mr. Abdul Qayyum Khan and an Italian Muslim Mr. Abd al Wahid Pallavicini who read a paper on "Religious freedom from the Islamic perspective in the spirit of Helsinki and Assisi".

Three experiences of the exposure programme stand out in particular:

1. The S. Egidio community and its commitment, dedication and youthful vitality was striking. If anything reflected the theme of the congress "Christian Mission Towards the Third Millennium: the Gospel of Hope" their work does not only in a general way, but specifically in their relations to Muslims.

2. The session with Cardinal Arinze and two of his colleagues in the Secretariat for non-Christians, where he gave generously of his time and experience allowing us to ask him many questions relating to the work of the Secretariat in relation to Islam. We learnt of the cooperation with Muslim World organisations and heard about the unprecedented exchange between the Gregoriana and Turkish universities where a Christian spends 4-6 months every year teaching the Christian faith in Turkish universities and a Muslim comes to Rome to teach Islam.

3. The encounter with Messrs. Khan and Pallavicin at PISAI was memorable in that we experienced on the one hand a very traditional, almost naive and certainly an uniformed view of the Christian tradition, and on the other hand, an openness regarding the tensions and weaknesses of the Muslim community in Italy. We discovered that the exposure programme had been a means of developing relationship between the Islamic Centre and PISAI.
Recommendations

1. A special vote of thanks to Fr. Armand and his colleagues at PISAI for their arrangements and hard work in preparing the programme;

2. A special vote of thanks to Cardinal Arinze for giving so unstintingly of his valuable time and openness in discussing sensitive issues;

3. An exposure programme on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations be arranged in connection with the next IAMS congress if appropriate, possibly including a meeting of representatives of Christian centres for the study of Islam and Christian Muslim relations.

Sigvard von Sicard

Exposure Programme »Healing«

Healing is central to our gospel message because Scriptures tells us that Christ came to redeem the suffering of humankind and bridge the gap between our alienated, sinful and frail state and our life-giving Creator. Thus this exposure to the healing ministry of the church here in Rome was an exposure to the very core of the gospel message being lived out today.

Probably the highlight of our experience was meeting -- at the end of a long afternoon of waiting -- the Roman Catholic Archbishop Milingo from Zambia who in 1982 was brought to Rome for questioning, strangely enough, for his very successful healing ministry -- which has made ardent followers out of his parishioners, first in Zambia, and now in Rome where thousands of Italians flock monthly to his healing services. The Czech cardinal who headed up the year-long inquiry into his ministry has said publicly, regarding Milingo's case, that healing is not central to the gospel message. When African Catholics hear this statement, they laugh, because in Africa they read the gospel and note that when Christ sent out his disciples he gave them "authority over unclean spirits with power to drive them out and to cure all kinds of disease and all kinds of illness" (Mt. 10:1) so that their concept of salvation has at its core the centrality of healing.

For missiologists, Milingo's case is symbolic of the choice Western Christian churches are forced to make: Will they retain their reins on cultural and theological exclusivity, or will the principles of missiology be applied so that doors will be opened to prophetic voices like Milingo's who are giving us theologies that resonate in new keys with the rhythms of the Third World? We all know that by the year 2,000 the majority of Christians will reside in the Third World and if we are to remain in fellowship across national and cultural barriers we must learn at least to appreciate theologies that come to our ears in foreign-sounding beats.

MISSION STUDIES 11