

VICISU



Vienna International
Christian-Islamic
Summer University 2012

Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University 1 to 21 July 2012

First Week

Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Gabriel
University of Vienna, Austria
“Introduction to Christianity“

Prof. Dr. Mualla Selçuk
Ankara University, Turkey
“Introduction to Islam“

Prof. Dr. Irmgard Marboe
University of Vienna, Austria
“Introduction to International Law“

Dr. Fatimah Husein
The State Islamic University
Yogyakarta, Indonesia
“Religious Pluralism“

Second Week

Prof. Dr. Ann Elizabeth Mayer
University of Pennsylvania, USA
“Islam and Human Rights“

Dr. Judith Albrecht
University of Bochum, Germany
“Gender and Religion“

Dr. Nimat Hafez Barazangi
Cornell University New York, USA
“Gender and Religion – Islamic
Perspective“

Prof. Dr. Mathias Rohe
University of Erlangen, Germany
“Islamic Law“

Prof. Dr. Javaid Rehman
Brunel University, United Kingdom
“Religious Minorities“

Third Week

Prof. Dr. Stefan Hammer
University of Vienna, Austria
“Religion and the State“

Prof. Dr. Irmgard Marboe
University of Vienna, Austria
“Islam and International Law“

Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Gabriel
University of Vienna, Austria
“Christian Social Ethics“

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The Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University 2012

Irmgard Marboe and Katharina Albrecht-Stadler

The Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University (VICISU) is a three week summer programme that aims at bringing together students and professors from universities spanning across all five continents. It evolved from the “Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table” (VICIRoTa), an initiative by academics from different fields of specialisation, such as law, theology and social sciences, in order to discuss the most important questions concerning our today’s world, from a Christian and from a Muslim perspective.

After 2008 and 2010, the third VICISU took place again at Stift Altenburg, a Benedictine monastery in Lower Austria. It is well known for its Garden of the Religions and combines the spiritual atmosphere of a Baroque building with the amenity of a modern campus, equipped with the facilities necessary for teaching and studying. It also offers a variety of sporting facilities as well as comfortable living space.

The Summer University of 2012 lasted from 1 to 21 July 2012 and was able to welcome 43 students from universities in many different European and non-European countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Morocco, Pakistan, Poland, Slovakia, South Africa and Austria. The academic programme consisted of lectures and tutorials. In addition, round tables

and discussions took place in the evenings. Zekirija Sejdini, the spokesperson of the Islamic Religious Community in Austria, talked about “Islam and Austria”, Prof. Salifu Kantanfe from Ghana spoke about the situation in his country, and Dr. Angelika Walser gave an evening lecture on “Gender and Religion from Christian Perspective”. Prof. Manfred Nowak (University of Vienna) and an Iranian delegation visited the Summer University in the framework of the “Academic Austro-Iranian Human Rights Talks” and participated in a round table on “Religion and the State – Unity or Separation?” Janet Lim from the UNHCR spoke about the role of religion in relation to refugees problems, and Prof. Andreas Bsteh, the founder of the Summer University, recapitulated the beginnings of the interreligious dialogue initiatives in Austria. Father Michael, responsible for guest relations, gave a guided tour through the Abbey of Altenburg and the Garden of Religions.



On 12 July, Abbot Christian Haidinger and the community of the abbey of Altenburg invited all the participants of the Summer University as well as prominent guests from Vienna and Lower Austria to a celebratory summer reception. The extracurricular programme was complemented by an excursion to the abbey of Melk and a boat trip on the Danube, a visit to the castle of Rosenberg as well as a number of social events, such as a multicultural talent show, an intercultural dinner and a number of sporting activities.

The last days of the Summer University took place in Vienna where the students received their certificates of participation by Vice-Rector Christa Schnabl of the

University of Vienna. They visited the city, including the main building of the University of Vienna and the United Nations, and were invited to a reception in the Vienna City Hall and a farewell party in a Viennese restaurant.

The Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University is organised by the University of Vienna and mainly funded by the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research (BWF). Additional sponsoring is provided by the Austrian Ministry for European and International Affairs (BMeiA), the Dreikönigsaktion (Austrian Childrens’ Charity Fund), the Province of Lower Austria and the City of Vienna. ♦





by Barbara Weitgruber, MA, Director General for Scientific Research and International Relations, Austrian Federal Ministry for Science and Research

The Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University – bringing together students and professors from universities across the world – does not only foster inter-religious dialogue between Christianity and Islam, but also contributes to intercultural understanding and provides a high quality interdisciplinary academic experience.

The Austrian Federal Ministry of Science and Research has a long tradition of supporting academic Christian-Islamic Dialogue activities – for many years the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Round Table at the

St Gabriel Institute for Theology of Religions and since 2008 the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University organized every two years by the University of Vienna at Altenburg Abbey.

As Director General for Scientific Research and International Relations it was a pleasure for me to meet many of the participants in summer of 2012 and I was impressed by the in-depth discussions from different – disciplinary and religious – perspectives, also reflecting very different personal and social backgrounds. I hope that the summer university programme and the stay at the Altenburg Abbey

did not only provide an academically and professionally, but also personally enriching experience for all participants.

I sincerely hope that the participants take the spirit of mutual understanding, respect, openness and intellectual encounters back to their universities and that they keep in academic and personal exchange with each other. In this way the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University will help to set the basis of a long-lasting network and ideally fulfill its role of a multiplier of ideas, academic excellency and friendships. ◊



by Ambassador Dr. Martin Eichtinger, Director General for Cultural Policy Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs

It is with great pleasure that I greet the participants and speakers of the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University (VICISU) 2012 and all the friends of this extraordinary program. I had the wonderful opportunity to participate in VICISU's "Sommerfest" at Altenburg Abbey on July 12 and to personally meet with this year's outstanding group of highly motivated young people and their lecturers from 21 countries.

The Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs supports VICISU, as intercultural and interreligious dialogue is a clear

priority of Austrian foreign policy. Austria considers herself to be a hub for dialogue activities which date back to the early nineties when the first Christian-Islamic Dialogue Conference took place in Vienna.

By launching and supporting dialogue initiatives such as VICISU we want to offer sustainable contributions to building worldwide trust and peace and combat the spread of stereotypes. Furthermore, our dialogue initiatives are designed to promote democracy and the universal respect for human rights and basic human freedoms, including the freedom of religion or belief.

Over the years, the participants of VICISU have formed an ever-growing worldwide network of young leaders who are well versed in issues of cultural diversity and who have acquired the skills of leading international dialogue and cross-cultural cooperation.

In concluding, I would like to express my deep appreciation to Abbot Christian Haidinger of Altenburg Abbey for hosting VICISU and to congratulate Professor Irmgard Marboe and her team on the great success of this worthwhile exercise in peace building and tolerance. ◊



Foto M. Kalchauer

by *Abbot Christian Haidinger, OSB (Austria)*

Four years ago, in July 2008, it was for the first time that we welcomed young Christians and Muslims from many countries in our abbey for the Vienna International Christian Islamic Summer University. I willingly admit: at that time, it was still an adventure. We did not know how this could possibly develop, an international and intercultural group living with us in the monastery for three weeks. But it was not just us who entered totally new territory but also the professors and the participants themselves. This year, it was our pleasure to be able to host the Vienna International Christian-Islamic Summer University for the third time.

Our monastery has existed for more than 850 years. Throughout this time, the monks have embraced their mission to serve people through their prayers and work. Today, our community consists of only twelve monks. We try to provide a spiritual centre for everybody and also spiritually accompany the people in the surrounding neighbourhoods.

The Abbey of Altenburg has engaged in serving interreligious dialogue for several years. We intend to offer a

space, a platform, as assigned to us by the Vatican Council. At this sacred synod, fifty years ago, we Catholic Christians were told to work sincerely for mutual understanding and to preserve as well as to promote together for the benefit of mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom (Nostra Aetate 3).

Therefore, we are glad and grateful that more than 40 students from 21 different countries, mostly from the Asian Continent, have come to this year's Summer University at our abbey in Altenburg and engaged in this dialogue throughout the intensive three-week-programme. I am very grateful to them for having accepted this challenge, because the dialogue of religions is indispensable for a successful future for us human beings.

Only if we know each other, only if we strive for honest and open conversations, and only if we encounter each other in deep respect, also in terms of our personal beliefs and convictions, we

can – in view of the huge problems and challenges in our contemporary world – stand up together for peace and justice on Earth.

As young and open-minded people, the participants of the Summer University will, wherever they live and work, be messengers of this hope. I am deeply convinced that the experience they have made in the three weeks at Altenburg, has encouraged and strengthened them to do so.

For us monks, the presence here of the students, tutors and professors and the encounters with them were a great enrichment. We have tried to provide the best conditions for their work and studies and accompanied their efforts with our prayers. ♦



Learning and Living Together

by *Irmgard Marboe (Professor of International Law, University of Vienna, VICISU Director)*

The third Vienna International Christian Islamic Summer University (VICISU) has again provided a very special opportunity for students and professors from Christian and Muslim countries: learning and living together, experiencing dialogue in all its dimensions. This time, from the first moment, the group was particularly harmonious, despite the remarkable diversity of countries of origin, cultures, and fields of study. The participants came from many different European and non-European countries. They studied law, theology, political sciences, but also chemistry and finance. Some live as a majority, some as a minority in their respective countries. Evidently, the social, economic and political backgrounds of the students were very diverse.

Nevertheless, we could feel a lot of sympathy from the first day onward. This feeling was a great contributor to the success of this year's Summer University and can be regarded as a confirmation of the classical philosopher Plato's hypothesis of dialogue: real truth can only be found through sympathy, not scepticism; the personal contact trigger interest and curiosity; it sharpens the minds for posing the right questions. This seemed to become a reality in our Christian-Muslim dialogue project. The friendly atmosphere created the personal confidence to ask these questions. The same confidence is necessary for trying to answer them.

I am deeply indebted to the professors and students of VICISU 2012 as well as the tutors and co-organisers. Co-director Professor Ingeborg Gabriel

has contributed with her experience of many years in inter-religious dialogue projects to shape the contents of



the programme. Katharina Albrecht-Stadler was responsible for all organisational matters and also an important contact person for the students. For the first time, we also had a full-time assistant at the Summer University, Christine Föger, who is an alumna of VICISU 2010 and who has dedicated her experience and enthusiasm to this year's students. Markus Beham, Irene Klissenbauer and Florian Mayr were responsible for the tutorials in the afternoons and managed to trigger lively and engaged discussions. Together with Christine Föger they were important bridge builders and helped to organise many extra-curricular activities during the Summer University. Finally, I convey my deep gratitude to our hosts, the monks of Stift Altenburg, in particular Abbot Christian, Father Michael, Father Albert and Father Josef for their warm hospitality and support of the VICISU throughout the years.

The academic programme rested on three main pillars: theology, law and social sciences. From the perspective

of these three disciplines, topical issues in the relationship between Christians and Muslims were discussed. The first week was dedicated to introductory courses to clarify terminology and to provide the basis for the discussion on more specialised topics. Professor Ingeborg Gabriel gave a course on “Introduction to Christianity”, in which she dealt with the religion’s most fundamental teachings and ideas. Professor Mualla Selçuk, in her “Introduction to Islam” highlighted certain concepts, such as that of ta’aruf (“getting to know one another”). In my course on “Introduction to International Law” the students should learn to understand the most fundamental legal principles governing international relations. We discussed the rights and obligations of States as the most important subjects of international law and focused on international human rights treaties which are most relevant for Christian-Muslim relationships within and between States. Professor Fatimah Husein gave a course on “Religious Pluralism”, which provided insight into theoretical aspects of pluralism in social science and theology, while at the same time making reference to a number of practical examples such as interreligious marriages in Indonesia.

The second week saw a multitude of courses ranging from international human rights to Islamic law and gender issues. Professor Ann Elizabeth Mayer gave insight into her internationally respected work on “Islam and Human

Rights”. She went into detail on a number of national constitutions of Muslim States and their relation to international human rights treaties. She showed that compatibility of Islam and human rights depended to a large extent on the interpretation of the concrete society or State in question. Dr. Judith Albrecht provided the students with a general framework of theoretical concepts to approach pertinent issues “Gender and Religion”. The course was continued by Professor Nimat Hafez Barazangi who specifically addressed questions relating to gender and Islam from a hermeneutical Muslim perspective based on the verses of the qur’an. Professor Mathias Rohe in his course “Islamic Law” not only managed to give a fresh view on Islamic law and the differentiation between its classic and its modern form but also discussed interesting examples from actual German case law and legislation. Professor Javaid Rehman rounded off the second week by raising a number of thought provoking questions regarding “Religious Minorities”.

In the third week, Professor Ingeborg Gabriel delivered another course specifically focusing on “Christian Social Ethics”. The course on “Islam and International Law”, held by myself, discussed some topical cases involving the freedom of religion and freedom of expression in Islamic countries and confronted them with cases decided by the European Court of Human Rights. The course on “Religion and the State” by Professor Stefan Hammer provided an

overview over the different models of the relationship between religion and the State and provoked a discussion on their respective advantages and disadvantages.

At the end of the three weeks, saying goodbye was very hard. But thanks to the modern media, in particular Facebook, the participants of the Summer University do remain in contact. At the moment, there are even two facebook groups bringing together former VICISU participants. One of them is the “official” VICISU alumni

network group, “VICISU – Network for a Better World” which brings together alumni and professors of the Summer University in 2008, 2010 and 2012. The lively activity on Facebook shows that the three weeks together initiated a process of further exchange and communication between Christians and Muslim in an atmosphere of trust and sympathy. This is one of the important aims of the VICISU, besides the academic programme, to enable personal contacts and build friendships for the future. ◊





The World in a Nutshell Showing that Harmony is Possible

by *Ingeborg Gabriel (Professor of Theology, University of Vienna, VICISU Co-Director)*

This year the Summer University took place for the third time in Stift Altenburg and as before it was a new and exciting experience for all who participated as well as for me personally. Each group is different and can and should not be compared to others just as each individual is different. As in former years, we, the organisers, were awaiting with curiosity and joy the many people, who were to come from all over the globe, with their different academic and personal backgrounds. I do not want to conceal that there is always also a certain amount of apprehension before their arrival: Will they meet the academic standards? Will they feel comfortable in Austria and with each other? Will there be some who are inclined to polarise within the group? Harmony between students coming from such diverse backgrounds, religious and otherwise, is after all never a given. It is a gift or, religiously speaking, a grace.

This year's group – and this again seemed like a miracle – formed a unity from the first day on – a unity that was deepened in numerous talks often lasting deep into the night as well as in common activities from singing, to dancing and of course playing football during these three weeks.

This unanimity of heart and thought was also felt in the classroom. As a long-term teacher, I consider it always a particular joy to teach at the VICISU. It is a unique experience, which one cannot have elsewhere, to teach Introduction into

Christianity and Social Ethics in front of such a diverse, bright, open as well as critical audience. I am learning as much from the students as I teach them – and this is after all what higher education and of course interreligious dialogue is all about.

If we distinguish between a dialogue of life, a dialogue in matters of theology proper and a dialogue in ethical issues, all three were practiced extensively in the setting of the monastery which again proved to be highly conducive to such a project. For me, the dialogue on ethical and legal issues is the most important in a globalized world where “no man is an island” (Hemingway). The setting in Stift Altenburg, however, shows that a spirituality which furthers peace and harmony is the basis for any such dialogue, which is to make a real contribution to the solution of the problems which beset today's world: hunger, homelessness, violent conflicts and wars, terrorism and the degradation of our environment, which is the very basis of our life on this planet, and a common heritage which belongs to all. I am deeply convinced that the credibility of our religions will depend on whether we can make real contributions to the solution and mitigation of these immense challenges of our world – instead of engaging in futile identity contests which put one against the other and create conflicts. In that sense, Altenburg is also a counter-programme in a world full of strife also on religious grounds.

I was deeply moved that all of the participants see this with great clarity and that therefore one of the first questions posed was: how can we promote this cause of better understanding between our religions when we get back to our homelands? How can we make a valid contribution to the world becoming a better and more peaceful place? How can we enhance better understanding between

Christianity and Islam, whose believers after all make up more than half of the world's population? This constitutes a great potential, but it can also be a great threat.

For me, the Summer University in Altenburg is each time a concrete sign and experience showing that harmony and conviviality of Christians, Muslims and non-believers is possible and – even more – that it can be very enriching

and a great learning experience for everybody. In this sense, I hope that we stay in contact over time and that we will meet again in one or the other place and at one or the other occasion.

I wish all the participants, the tutors, professors and other supporters all the best and God's blessings! ◇





The Gardens of Stift Altenburg

by Ann Elizabeth Mayer (Professor at Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania)

In July 2012 I had the honour to spend a week teaching in the VICISU summer programme on the splendid premises of the Stift Altenburg. With its unique Garden of Religions, the Stift provided an appropriate and welcoming setting for encounters of Christians and Muslims, both of whom come from religious traditions where gardens have symbolic resonance. I am deeply grateful to the organisers, who did an outstanding job of bringing together a group of promising students from a wide variety of backgrounds and making arrangements for a rewarding experience for all participants. I also appreciate the efforts of the unfailingly helpful staff.

My classes concerned Islam and human rights, one of the areas where uninformed stereotypes proliferate that assume that a “clash of civilizations” pits Muslim societies against the values endorsed in the West, such as UN human rights principles. The reality is far more complex. There certainly have been Muslims who denounced human rights as incompatible with Islam, but study shows that Muslims have played constructive roles in generating the UN human rights instruments and have continued to be among the most courageous and eloquent proponents of human rights ideals. At the same time, ideologues and governments of Muslim States – like many of their non-Muslim counterparts – have often espoused policies sharply in conflict with human rights, policies that correlate more closely with their own political agendas than with any eternal Islamic essence.

I hoped that during the course of lectures and discussions students would gain a background that would enable them to distinguish between the repressive Islams endorsed by undemocratic regimes and their ideological allies and the Islamic heritage itself, a heritage that is so vast and multifaceted that it defies any simple classifications and that

is demonstrably full of values that combine readily with human rights. In the course of frequent conversations with students, I gained a sense that many of them were stimulated to think hard about the big questions that any investigation of the relationship of Islam and human rights entails.

The Danish cartoons controversy of 2005-2006 provided one example of a scenario where the exercise of human rights – here the right to freedom of expression invoked by cartoonists working in Denmark – was portrayed as clashing with Islamic tenets, which precluded depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, especially ones that were demeaning. A case that could have provided the basis for academic dissections of issues like why Islamic law should apply to the conduct of non-Muslims in Denmark



quickly morphed into an international crisis. There were many factors other than Islam per se that meant that the cartoonists’ actions prompted expressions of outrage. Encouraging escalation of the controversy from a marginal event to an acrimonious confrontation were factors such as the recent history of clashes between Western



States and several of their Muslim counterparts over the politics of human rights, contention over immigration policies and terrorism, and diverging views on whether national laws on censorship had to be tailored to fit ideas of sanctity. The confrontation was quickly exploited by publicity-hungry provocateurs on both sides who showed themselves eager to manipulate intercommunal tensions so as to stir up grievances and aggravate suspicions.

The Danish cartoonists, living in a country where freedom of expression was upheld and where Christian sanctities were not protected from mockery, had an understanding of what the significance of their act was – asserting the freedom to challenge religious taboos, including those involving Islam – that was entirely different from what the offended Muslims understood the notorious cartoons to signify – a deliberate insult to Islam and to Muslims. From their standpoint, the cartoons resembled the kind of hate speech that is prohibited in international human rights law. In the course of the ensuing angry clashes, neither side seemed to be gaining any appreciation of other’s point of view; instead, positions hardened and negative stereotypes gained credibility.

International human rights law can assist in assessing some dimensions of this controversy, but considera-

tions grounded in ethics and intercultural sensitivity should also come into play. I like to think that VICISU students were developing an educated awareness of the issues at stake in the Danish cartoons dispute and acquiring insights that could be deployed in future cases to mitigate the destructive frictions that such disputes can produce.

With their VICISU background, students might manage to convey in such instances why it is urgent

to pursue dialogue to clarify issues that are of concern to each side. In general, I view the VICISU experience as a potential incubator of mediators who may be able to foster enhanced communications between Muslims and Christians, carrying out an invaluable function in a turbulent era bedevilled by trends that tend to exacerbate divisiveness. Such mediators might serve as counterweights to those with an interest in stirring up antagonisms who try to seize upon this kind of case as a means to polarise communities.

In this regard, I recall the small Garden of Creation that is maintained on the south side of Stift Altenburg’s handsome baroque church, a perfect spot for meditation. This quiet garden has been divided into separate domains, including a “chaos corner,” which is carefully kept apart from auspicious domains like “peace”, “life’s possibilities” and “salvation”. Observing that in the serene environs of Stift Altenburg the threat of chaos can be acknowledged but measures be taken to contain it while exalting values of a higher order, I am encouraged to hope that those who have had the privilege of living and studying in these inspiring surroundings will depart with a vocation to promote the harmonious growth of intercultural understanding. ◊



Intra-Religious, the Means to Interreligious Discussions

by *Nimat Hafez Barazangi (Lecturer at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York)*

Thank you, Stift Altenburg, for the peaceful atmosphere and for the generous hospitality and spirituality that helped me develop constructive reflections. Thank you, VICISU 2012, for giving me the opportunity to be challenged and challenging. And thank you, students and colleagues, for making me feel welcomed and welcoming by further opening my heart and mind.

Without these three components – Stift Altenburg, VICISU, colleagues and students –, I would not have been able to realise in action what I have designed, nor to start an open intra-religious and interreligious discussion. When I designed my mini-course on gender and Islam from the self-identity perspective, “Woman Self-Identity with Islam and Why”, I intended the focus to be on the art of intra-religious interaction that is essential for an honest interreligious dialogue. Having as my point of reference the primary and the only divine source of my faith – the Qur’an – I wanted to free myself and the participants from the biased boundaries of sex, gender, ethnicity, race, nationality, and institutionalised religion. Only then, I believe, would we, as self-identified individuals, have been able to honestly and critically understand the common grounds – the principles – that ethically bind all faiths. Once I brought myself out of the box – out of others’ interpretations of my identity and of my faith –, I was able to have a deeper understanding of the relationship between the moral and the legal of my faith, and its relation to other faiths. Being continuously grounded in the scriptural text, I was also able to accommodate contemporary views on human rights and other advocacies. Such realisation helped me relate to the participants both the art of self-identity, and the art of intra-religious interaction.

The open structure of the VICISU programme provided the means for engaging both the minds and the

hearts. By engaging critically with Islam’s primary and secondary sources through teaching my mini-course, I became more convinced that people are influenced by their own beliefs and prior knowledge, more so than by classical literature when debating socio-ethical issues. For example, the issue of Muslim woman’s head-cover, though not required in the Qur’an, continues to obscure the most fundamental challenge to Muslim societies – namely the absence of Muslim women from shaping and developing Islamic thought. Because it is wrongly labelled “hijab” the head-cover remains widely misunderstood and highly problematic for Muslim women. Because hijab is used erroneously to assume women’s complete seclusion, it was necessary to have a frank discussion of what is Qur’anic (Islamic) and what is cultural. The open and honest engagement during the class and the tutorial brought this issue to the surface. It also helped relating the meaning of Islamic higher learning (deeper knowledge of Islam) and its significance for Muslim women.

The opportunity to have multiple discussions on what is said in the classroom during meals and breaks helped ease the tension that participants may have experienced when their prior knowledge or premises were challenged by new (to them) ideas. As some of the participants began to formulate their arguments by addressing gender from within the framework of the Islamic concept of tawhid (no deity but God), they indirectly were also engaged in an intra-religious discussions among each other and for themselves. During the tutoring session, it became clear that some tension in the classroom or during an open discussion with others is helpful. It is such tension that brings the individual to questioning her prior knowledge and assumptions. Uncomfortable as that might be at the beginning, it is the cognitive dissonance resulting from this tension that helps one realising her biases and make her

seek a way to modify or discard them. By further engaging critically with some examples from the assigned primary and secondary material, the tension was used more constructively. For example, one participant suggested a game to explain how one may think “out of the box”, and when she demonstrated that, the entire class was relieved.

In conclusion, understanding the complex relationship between the text of the Qur’an and hadith (Prophet Muhammad traditions), in this context – ethics and contemporary Muslim societies’ gender policies – may benefit more from the participants being involved in teaching/tutoring from their own perspective. It was evident that when a participant presented a challenge, the end results were more effective. Thank you, Professors Marboe and

Gabriel, for giving me this opportunity to experience such an unprecedented project and to invite me also to share my reflections, Wa-al-Salaam Alaykum (Peace be with you all). ◊





Beyond Good and Evil

by Moinuddin Ahmed (India)

“That which is done out of love always takes place beyond good and evil.” – Friedrich Nietzsche

It is neither an intellectual coincidence nor an academic compulsion for me to invoke mighty philosophers while reflecting upon my three-week-long life during the VICISU 2012. A mere thought about what I experienced while living in a 1000-year-old Benedictine Monastery, Stift Altenburg, makes it imperative for me borrow the expressions from Friedrich Nietzsche and Jalaluddin Rumi, to reciprocate my feelings to all who shared moments of joy, sorrow and togetherness with me.

The daily life at Stift Altenburg, constituted by studying, talking, playing, strolling, laughing and music across the lush green outfield and rooms with magnificently artistic ceilings, was something close to celestial bliss. Sitting with friends in the field sometimes to bask in the sun, sometimes under the glittering stars and sometimes to feel the caresses of the breeze often stretched my imagination to empathise with 13th century mystic, Jalaluddin

Rumi, who once predicted a field beyond the ideas of wrongdoing and right doing.

The reason why it compels me to recollect all these experiences and religious imagination is the fact that many things that were done with the pure idea of understanding and coexistence, had essential human instincts that might derive certain morals from various belief systems, yet there is a practice of an intuitive consensus that is required to restore peace and harmony in this world. The summer university was not reduced to the study and practice of religious traditions, the participants brought to the forth quintessence of humanism that drives a person most of his/her lifetime.

It all began with a social relationship or what my friends would cherish a ta'aruf, which took place between us while we were wondering about the sheer beauty and intense silence of the surroundings. The beauty remained as it was but silence had a tough time since it was disturbed with raising the first collective toast – “Prost!”.

It was a beautiful evening for most of us who reached the picturesque Altenburg, leaving behind our backyards that were burning at 45 degrees Celsius.

People had just started to know each other, when a bunch of dark clouds came in with an alarm of a thunderstorm. Call it a divine choreography or a transcendental ordain, the moment brought the scattered souls together, making an exodus for safe haven. People belonging to different nationalities, various languages and diverse cultures moved together to find places where they could enjoy the majestic evening and yet remain unaffected by the rain.

If rain brought people close to each other, it was cigarettes that should get the credit for making many of the people stay together. The more smoke they were exhaling, the clearer it was getting between them. Gradually, the non-smokers also started to join the conversation, although, with an evident detest for the burning nicotine stick stuck to the lips of their fellows. The learning process started there and then. By the time the VICISU 2012 was in its second week, both smokers and non-smokers got well versed with each others' habits and grew tolerant, making room for each other to follow their respective lifestyles.

If Hamelin had a Pied Piper, Altenburg had a few magical strummers. If music can be accused of putting heart above all human senses, it won't be wrong. In this case, hearts strum the instruments, hearts sing songs and hearts do the listening. Music is something that echoed even in the extreme corners of Altenburg. It was a great unifying force, it was the call for bonhomie, it was the content for dreams, it was the fodder for thoughts and it was the solace for separation. The music that came from various parts of the world, converging into the six strings of a guitar near the central fountain still resonates in the hearts of the participants.

Sports can't be left when there is a talk of youth and exuberance. Sports, particularly soccer was on top of everyone's mind coming to Austria at a time when Euro 2012 was in its final stages. By the time Spain became champions yet again, the Ronaldos, the Roonys and the Balotellis of Altenburg were ready to be on the fields. Not

only football, the indoor sports including table tennis, pool and air hockey, also generated the same level of enthusiasm and a sheer sense of teamwork among the participants. The games were played way beyond the indulgence of winning and losing, they were played for essential joy and appreciation of life and sought to bring smile on the faces of the “opponents”.

“Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend.”

Albert Camus, while writing this, would never have the slightest of idea that his words would become an unsung but a thoroughly practiced anthem for those who walked the slender cycle lanes to reach nearby town Horn or “The Horn”. It all started with curiosity to see a market place, have McDonald's food, do some shopping, but as and when the days started to pass by, the 5-kilometer walk turned into a ritual of celebrating friendship, rejoicing the off-campus life and of course seeing other people who were scarcely available in Altenburg.

For those who believe that the love for food is the most sincere love in the world, going to dining hall was like a pilgrimage. And to the delight of the foodies, no one among the participants was bitten by the ‘size-zero bug’, which means that most of them were open to the idea of having undefined meals including breakfast, lunch, brunch, crunch, munch, grind, supper, dinner and everything throughout the day. The supper at 6 p.m. was taken as starter followed by several rounds of brown bread and nutella, fruits, peanuts, juices tea and coffee every hour. And as they say, necessity is the mother of invention, many new cuisines were invented on-the-spot in order to bring freshness to the menu. Hunger and survival are implicit phenomena that could be understood with complete empathy and this was something that bound together a cluster of diverse stars.

Every Treasure Island has a Long John Silver, so has the story of Altenburg and this time the antagonist proved to be Austrian cops. No, they were not bad, rude or offensive, they were just too oblivious of the fact there a Summer



University was taking place and the “colourful creatures” strolling around the streets of the village were very much a part of that congregation. The participants, however, saw the lighter side of their respective close encounter with the cops and let themselves be ferried back to Stift Altenburg. The writer of this article was also asked where did he come from, however, that became a lifetime opportunity for him to use his Deutsch skills and he got away by replying: “Ich komme aus Indien!” (I am from India)

A mere thought about what happened in the three weeks in Stift Altenburg and then in Vienna provokes a lot of sentiments, each one pulling back to the past. The way life and time changed was phenomenal. It started with a whole night passing like a moment and ended up being a moment difficult to pass throughout the night; it began with an effort to know others and culminated with knowing ourselves; it kicked off with an image of unification but ended up with the reality of separation with

promises to be together once again; it initiated with a responsibility to manage ourselves in a foreign land and terminated with the responsibility of to manage peace and understanding throughout the world.

Life, they say, first takes test then teaches lesson, it was truly a test for Muslims, Protestant Christians and non practicing people, to stay in a Benedictine Monastery and live their lives according to their own belief systems. They took the test, passed it with flying colours and then learned a lesson: When God’s creations come across each other, they identify each others as fellows beyond good and evil. They may not say anything but convey a coherent message of love, harmony and coexistence. This is what happened with all of us belonging to different confessions, studying and practicing religion, but never made it a tool for conflict, for us our beliefs weaved a strong thread of concord. And hence, leaving the imagination of VICISU beyond the understanding of this article. ◇



“Enjoy the three quiet weeks in a monastery...”

by Markus Beham (Austria)

For at least the last half year or so, whenever someone asked me about my summer plans and I started telling them about being a tutor at the VICISU for the first three weeks of July, I usually got the same blank stare and row of questions: “So you’ll be spending the whole time there? You are not going to Vienna in between? So what are you going to be doing all that time?” I would then usually go on to reply: “Enjoy the three quiet weeks in a monastery, sit through some of the courses and use some of the time for myself to get on with my Ph.D. – after all, where better than there to just shake off the distractions of Vienna for a little while.”

It did not take more than a day to realise: I could not have been more wrong. During the welcome reception and the first few friendly conversations that followed, the feeling dawned over me that it might just not be as quiet as I had originally presumed. Bringing work and my notebook into classes did not help get any work done. The excellent lecturers and often even more encapsulating discussions proved it hard to concentrate on anything else than that. In between classes it was the many conversation shared that kept me from retreating to my room to work. Each breakfast, lunch or dinner turned out to be an opportunity for new impressions, new stories, another personality from another part of the world.

Throughout these three weeks I was exposed to so many things and took back home with me so many personal experiences, I can hardly recount each and every instance: in just three weeks I got to learn what to take care of if I want to marry in Ghana, danced an Indonesian wedding dance, eat Pakistani pickles and listened to Persian poetry. A detail to my bad: it took the VICISU for me to play football and volleyball for the first time again in probably six or seven years. For the first time in my life,

I attended Muslim Friday prayer. I was taken aback at the gratitude shown for our “effort” at showing good-will by taking – much rather than an effort, I found it a great interesting and personal experience and am grateful for having been able to attend.

Along the second week, due to lack of alternative bards one evening, I got prompted to pick up the guitar and play along – something I have been practicing daily again since the VICISU. That is one of the innumerable reasons I still continue to think of the time spent together at Stift Altenburg each day. But I hope that every single person attending will not just have taken with them the academic lectures, the weekend sight-seeing trips or the overflow of Facebook activity following their return home – I sincerely hope that everyone will continue to remember all the good times with people from so many different faiths and cultural backgrounds, no matter which stages of life they are in or how far in the future it may be, and carry exactly that atmosphere inside themselves and out towards the people around them in their lives. ◇





Great Minds, Great Interaction, Happy Family

by Rita Alhassan (Ghana)

Stift Altenburg has been a wonderful and interesting place for 43 students from all parts of the world to stay for the VICISU 2012. You can imagine the diversity in culture, religion and even the individual perception of each person. As my flight set off, I was worrying on how I would interact with 42 other people, whom I would be meeting for the first time – but I soon realised that I had nothing to worry about, despite the differences of all our backgrounds.

This has been my first time in a country with total strangers – meeting everyone for the first time in my life. No old memories to talk about, only new things to learn and know about one another. I found it interesting to be in such a nice environment, learning from and knowing one another and our countries.



The first day I felt lonely – everyone seemed strange to the other and I missed home so much. It was like living in an unknown environment far away with no relations or family. For the first time in my life, I had travelled far from home to live together with people from different continents, of different race, culture and religion. I soon came to know that this was an experience I would not want to miss.

I could not have believed that spending my time with these people could make me forget the home I had at first so much wished to return back to. As the lectures started, we got to interact with each other – we got to know each other, which I found so interesting and loved so much. The whole programme was a success since everyone was ever ready to share with the other all the issues and events in their respective home countries.

Some stories were marvelled at, others frowned upon.

But besides the great lectures we had, we also learned from each other respect for one another. There were beautiful smiles whenever we met as a group, interesting stories and even music to make everyone happy. It was a world of its own and for me it was as heaven on Earth, in which the people were angels allowing us to enjoy ourselves there.

In the twinkle of an eye I had a happy family in Stift Altenburg. This family was so lovely that I loved every

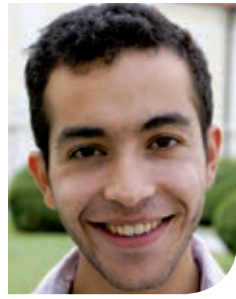
one I met and spoke with. I loved my new home, my new family and all the people I met. I had the opportunity to freely interact with others, to learn, change and develop my personality. This I managed through ta'aruf (to learn, recognise, explore and to understand), a concept taught in the Introduction to Islam lectures. I was so excited about everything. I wished to extend my stay and was sad to leave the group. What I gained from this experience has influenced and changed my life, my family, neighbours and everything else around me for a better life now and in the future.

The amazing part is that people of different faiths come to live together, understand each other and have a great time. Despite the fact that we were of different faiths and

have great ties and sentiments for our beliefs, we also focused more on God, the creator and giver of life. Wow! I would never wish to have left out this great experience, in which you find Christians joining Muslims for Friday prayer as well as Muslims sitting in church for Sunday service. Wonderful! Living together in Stift Altenburg was marvellous, super and beyond description.

The loneliness and anxiousness I had experienced, when I first left my home country turned out to be happiness and joy of being part of this group. I entered Stift Altenburg sad with homesickness and left in tears after having to leave my new family. I am happy and proud to say that I have brothers and sisters in all parts of the world because of VICISU 2012. ◇





Beyond Inter-Religious Dialogue

by Tachfine Baïda (Morocco)

The third VICISU – at a first glance, a program of this kind could just be seen as one of the many initiatives meant to promote dialogue between people from different religions. Today, in a European context increasingly threatened by a rise of religious extremism, these kinds of programmes are indeed much needed. With “Muslim” minorities suffering from various aspects of marginalisation on one side, and individuals from “Christian” traditions feeling threatened by growing figures of immigration into their home countries, such initiatives would be an effective way of bridging understanding between people from different faiths.

But the third edition of the VICISU was in fact far more than just that, than but a simple gathering of people of Christian and Muslim faith. It was a real spiritual and intellectual experience between individuals, whose personality had been shaped by different cultural and social backgrounds. At the VICISU, each participant had a unique way of perceiving and understanding the meaning of life. Even among people from the same religion, country, or even culture, every individual had their own specific version and interpretation of spirituality, divinity and existence itself. In other words, every individual’s experience with faith was truly different.

Attempting to Make Sense of Life

While today many people would still fight over the posture one should have while doing their prayer – even though they sometimes share the same religion – the dialogue experiment conducted in the context of the VICISU was exceptionally positive. Differences between participants’ opinions, values, and beliefs proved to be a source of strength rather than division. For instance, whereas participants did not always agree on issues such

as inheritance, gender roles, or sexuality, it seems that they ultimately enjoyed learning from the opinion and interpretations of others.

In this sense, it did not quite matter whether a person was praying in a church or in a mosque. Nor did it really matter that an individual was drinking alcohol or was wearing a veil. What really mattered was that all participants were basically there for a similar purpose. They were all human beings who were attempting to make sense of life. That was the most important force, which drove the participants seeking knowledge. No one attempted to reject the opposite’s beliefs in favour of his or her own. Much rather, all were eager to learn from each other through respectful dialogue.

Experiencing Pluralism in a Medieval Abbey

It might seem ironic that a Benedictine abbey built in the Middle Ages served as the stage for an exceptional form of pluralism. People from different cultural backgrounds found themselves praying within the same space, eating

the same food, playing the same games, and laughing at the same jokes. No religious constraints were imposed on anyone. People could display religious symbols, voice their opinions, and share their ideas freely and without fear of being discriminated. Even on the most heated topics, participants were able to overcome their differences and mutually learn from each other.

Perhaps even more interestingly, participants of the VICISU seemed to have blended out the political and ideological differences of their respective countries. While it is true that groups of people sharing the same nationality or culture formed initially, it is amazing to realise that by the end of the program such behaviour was completely absent. Effective dialogue prevailed over cultural, political and ideological constructs. People from different parts of the world merged together, sharing their ideas and without even being afraid of sometimes criticising their own religious beliefs, political regimes and national ideologies.

Setting an Example for the World

Surely, it is not possible to achieve a complete understanding between people from different cultural backgrounds in only three weeks. It would not seem feasible to solve the divisions that centuries of isolation have created between two of the world’s most important cultural entities in such a limited amount of time.

And of course, misunderstandings and disagreements in spiritual, political, or legal issues might still persist among the participants of the VICISU. Nonetheless, the most important thing the initiative conveyed to its participants is the desire to continue dialoguing, questioning, and interacting with people of different faith.

It is just remarkable to see the result of the third edition of the VICISU. The majority of participants expressed their willingness to replicate their experience in Austria in their home countries or whenever this would be possible in the future. Participants were also determined to meet and see each other again. Through social networks, they kept a continuous contact, sharing their pictures, thoughts and souvenirs. For the majority of the participants, it appears VICISU has been a life-changing experience.

The overall experience of the VICISU also comes to remind the entire world that peaceful co-existence is possible between people from different beliefs. It shows that the violence which the world has been suffering from through many centuries because of religious differences is not inherent within religions themselves. It signals that religious differences do not necessarily need to result in discrimination, egocentrism and hatred. And ultimately, it suggests to both people from Christian and Islamic traditions that, at the end of the day, they are but human beings who are just seeking ways to make sense of their own lives. ◇





“WHAT?”

by 9ja UbbY5 'lFUk J(Saudi-Arabia)

It's been three weeks since I got home from Austria as I'm writing this. Three weeks since I've felt a chill breeze blowing and rain drops rolling down my cheeks. Three weeks since I've laughed so hard I thought my stomach would explode. Three weeks since roaming the streets of Vienna looking for a restaurant to break my fast. Three weeks ago, hearing phrases like “Urdu mat bolo”, “jabuka” and “The Horn” – meaningful only to us as “insiders” – was natural and a regular occurrence. If you had asked me three weeks ago what my feelings were for going back home I would have told you I could not imagine a world without the crazy participants of VICISU 2012. Indeed, I could barely envision a time of not knowing them. However, I am now back home, in Jeddah KSA, and it has been three weeks since I left those dear teary faces behind and it is no longer an imagination; it is a reality, and I find myself unable to deal with such truth. Surprisingly, I actually still have not been able to form words to describe my experience at VICISU and my feelings towards my fellow colleagues, nor am I able to express the emotions I felt and still feel about leaving.



Perhaps I am not as articulate as I once thought I was; or perhaps I am merely at a loss for words due to the magnitude of overflowing emotions. Irrespective of the reason, I realise it will be nigh impossible to write such thoughts and feelings on paper. Thus, I have decided to approach my article from a mere philosophical point of view.

I am a recently graduated law student who, before this three week experience, always expressed my opinion strongly on various topics, especially those related to theology, and more often than not, argued my way through a discussion in a very point-by-point manner. And it worked out pretty well for me I must say. During my first week in Altenburg I followed this method as I had before, towards fellow colleagues, but especially toward our professors. But very soon I realised, we were not here to debate, we were here to listen, learn and respect one another. Although I may have gotten my thoughts across eloquently, that way of thinking denied me the opportunity to listen to what the others were saying fully. After having recognised that, I started to truly listen and wait for the speaker to finish their point, after which I would analyse from their perspective then my own before formulating my reply. This led me to become much quieter in lectures and no doubt (to the joy of the professors) less annoying. This was not due to lack of reaction and response on my part; rather I would sit there pondering the point that had been delivered and either come to some form of common agreement, or decide it would be better to address at a later time. Most discussions did in fact occur out of class. Perhaps that was due to the informal manner of the dialogue or the absence of the want for right or wrong that may have been vaguely present in the lecture hall. Or perhaps the presence of food merely made us more talkative.

One of the professors, Dr. Mathias Rohe, stated at some point in his lecture “diversity within unity”. I fail to remember to what he was referring, nevertheless, the phrase just stuck. It described our group very well. We had come from all over the world, from different cultural and religious backgrounds, each with his or her own belief and perspective, yet here we were; in one lecture hall, cramming for the same exam, laughing at the same jokes and eating the same food. However, this phrase does not only describe the human race, it is also a reflection of a single human being. Although we are “individuals”, we are far from singular in our thinking. Our different opinions are based on our many experiences with other people. Our characters are a collection of numerous opinions, viewpoints, notions and impressions. The words we utter are a manifestation of the diversity of our thoughts. This led me to relate this philosophy to the Religious Pluralism lectures. In one lecture, we were required to analyse, in groups, the rules of dialogue. One such rule prescribed the need to dialogue to understand oneself. When I presented in class I had strengthened that point by adding that one does not truly understand oneself before attempting to understand



the other. We may never grow if we do not learn how to water our minds with the opinions of others.

I have no doubt grown within those three weeks more than I may have done in three years. It was an enlightening experience overshadowed by nothing but the parting of dear friends. As I'm sitting here with my hands hovering over the keyboard, my stomach growling, counting the minutes till sunset so I may break my fast, I realise the deprivation of food and other worldly temptations in this month of Ramadan and the self-control is has strengthened me with, has in fact helped me cope with the loss of my 43 brothers and sisters. Had I returned home to a regular routine I would have gone mad. However, I am now in the atmosphere of Ramadan, making me believe that all is well. Lord, help me when this holy month is over and I truly grasp the awful staggering reality.

On another note, I would like to extend my gratitude and great appreciation towards Mark Zuckerberg for creating Facebook, and most importantly to God for allowing him to do so! ♦





Going back to the roots by looking forward

by Yeghia Tashjian (Lebanon)

“Everyone is from Adam and Adam is from clay” – Prophet Muhammad

It was May 2011, a friend and I were at a café arguing about the regional developments as usual, when suddenly we saw Syrians protesting against their regime and shouting “the people want to overthrow the regime” from the television screen. For a minute we were shocked and stunned, then my friend turned to me and said in Arabic “allah yestor” (“God help us”). He was referring to our uncertain future as Christians in the region. For a moment I was thinking that as a Lebanese Armenian whose ancestors experienced Genocide and had been deported from their historical lands, am I ready to experience another one? What should I do if radical Islamist movements held power in Syria, and how would it shape Lebanese politics? Such questions made me worry about our destiny, as minorities, in the boiling Middle East.

As the Arab Spring broke up, Syria took the attention of the regional and global interests, due to its significant geopolitical position and sectarian structure, the country

turned into a battleground. Having witnessed their dark fate in Iraq, Christians were on alert again.

It was in the fall of 2012 when my professor encouraged me to write a paper on the Islamic movements of the region. After reading several books and conducting online interviews with Muslim Brotherhood figures, I realised that we, I myself being a social democratic, shared some common values: we believe in social justice, democracy, human rights... While the ends were the same, the means were different – but didn’t Machiavelli claim that the ends justified the means? Although this made me somewhat optimistic, I found that I needed to know more about them, their religion and way of thinking. And the VICISU gave me that chance. Two professors, Dr. Seljuk from Turkey and Dr. Barazangi from USA influenced my thoughts, helped me to develop my critical thinking and to know more about the holy Qur’an, Islamic teachings and its laws, and (most importantly) the concept of ta’aruf (co-existence) changed my view towards Islam. According to Dr. Seljuk, the Prophet Muhammad has been said to have warned his followers against the idea of superiority

of a group and warned us of ghuluw (extremism) in religion. The holy Qur’an also ensures this by insisting that religious education should have a particular focus on the issue of equality and pluralism, mutual respect and solidarity between peoples of different faiths and that cultures can contribute immensely to the prevalence of peace and co-existence in our world.

The Qur’an reinforces the need for qist (balance) in faith. Therefore, for proper co-existence, we should recognise ourselves and control our behaviour towards others, which is where the concept of “knowing thyself” comes into play.

In order to study Islamic movements one should go back to the roots, their history. Generally speaking, Arabs experienced a golden age during the Fatimid and Umayyad Caliphate periods, for example, where debates about religion, politics, science, sex and economics and so on would take place in mosques – even women would participate in these debates. Interestingly, Christians held key positions in the government and some of them were advisers of the sultan and were protected during these periods, one example being the holy city, Jerusalem, where peace prevailed between the three Abrahamic religions. So what happened then? Why did women lose their social status? Why were minorities persecuted? And why did most Islamic societies become economically, scientifically and politically backward? What about their future?

A modern case study might be the Muslim Brotherhood. They were founded in Egypt in 1928 as a pan-Islamic movement. The Brotherhood has placed emphasis on social justice. Closing the gap between the classes became one of its main objectives and its founder Hasan al-Banna declared: “Islam is equal for all people and prefers nobody to others on the grounds of differences in blood or race, forefathers or descent, poverty or wealth. According to Islam everyone is equal... However, in deeds and natural gifts, then the answer is yes. The learned is above the ignorant... Thus, we see that Islam does not approve of the class system.” Al-Banna even defined the term jihad (struggle-“holy war”) as follows: “[I]t referred

not only to armed struggle to liberate Muslim lands from colonial occupation, but also to the inner effort that Muslims needed to make in order to free themselves from an ingrained inferiority complex and from fatalism and passivity towards their condition.” From these arguments we might be able to claim that the Muslim Brotherhood has some socialist views and rejects radicalism. Therefore it is the duty of such organisations to control extremism – lets us not forget that Christians in the Middle East and North African regions had contributed a lot towards the modernisation of Islam, making Christians necessary for Islam. This should also be a sign for the West that Islam is indeed a tolerant religion and has, in itself, nothing to do with “terrorism”.



To conclude, one might say that the region has suffered a lot as a result of attempts to exclude Islamists and deny them a role within the public sphere. Undoubtedly, Islamists’ participation in governance will give rise to a number of challenges, both within the Islamic ranks and with regard to relations with other local and international forces. Secularists and leftists – who themselves failed to bring prosperity and democracy to our countries – must monitor the Islamists within the governmental institutions and hold them check for every wrong step they make. At the same time, Islamists should be careful not to fall into the trap of overconfidence: they must not take extreme steps but rather compromise and respond to the demands of the people and protect the minorities as well as women’s rights. Hence, there is nothing wrong in going back to the roots and back towards the fundamental laws of Islam as long as we look ahead and liberate ourselves from mental oppression and try to build a better future together. ◊





Transcending Religious Boundaries

by David Muvangho (South Africa)

Introduction

Even though the concept of love features very prominently in all religions, practical inter-religious harmony has always been as elusive as the pursuit of a mirage in the desert. In the stead of eternal peace, interreligious mistrust and wars have been our constant companions from time immemorial. But at the VICISU, held at Stift Altenburg monastery, located in Lower Austria, a sparkling brand new chapter in the interreligious relations has been opened. It is a chapter that is bound to obliterate the history of interreligious intolerance, disharmony and violence. If the atmosphere, which pervaded the 2012 Summer University were to be seen as a harbinger of the world to come, then we should be happy that the seeds of a harmonious co-existence amongst people of different religious beliefs have fallen into a fertile ground.

Football as a model for the future

In particular, the football games we played during this recent summer university have been a microcosm of the future we all yearn for. They encapsulated an aura of cheerfulness and collectivism, which should become characteristic of the relationship amongst people of different religious beliefs and faiths. The football games have also shown be-

yond any shadow of doubt that religious boundaries are transcendable and that it is possible to interact with “the other” without using religion as a frame of reference.

Ordinarily, a football game, as we all know, is a very fierce and uncompromisingly competitive sport. But the one we played at Stift Altenburg during the 2012 VICISU was not your every day kind of football. Everything about “our” kind of football was something of a maverick from your concept of mainstream football. Only three players wore full soccer kit. There was no referee and still no chaos. In essence, our football games threw the world of this sport on its head, thereby discarding old rules and inventing new ones.

We gave our teams very jocular names: C’EVAPCICI and HOT CHICKENS. C’evapcici was named after an irresistibly delicious Bosnian dish. Looking at the names of the two teams, one might mistake them for cooking contestants. But wait until you come to the field. Then you realise that the two teams are equally competitive and their games are incomparably entertaining.



In the three games played between the two “arch-rivals”, the pitch was always overflowing with cheerfulness from both players and spectators. Some spectators turned themselves into overnight paparazzi, capturing and immortalising our most memorable moments.

Turning soccer pitch into a laboratory

In essence, the soccer pitch was turned into a laboratory in miniature to test the applicability of core principles on which the future world, as envisioned in the VICISU project, should be anchored. It was on the soccer field that the principles learnt in the lecture halls could find their first application. Amongst them, ta’aruf, love, pluralism and human rights were very prominent. It is quite unfathomable how such principles could so quickly find their way onto the soccer pitch. But as they say, where there is a will there is a way. With students so driven by such an insatiable quest to be agents of change, everything is possible, and every platform could be used to check the feasibility of what has been learnt in the lecture hall.

The overriding focus of our games was not to win, but to interact with the other team and making sure that we both enjoy the game of soccer. To borrow from the words of Prof. Mualla Selçuk, it was literally a “ta’aruf” of some kind. The atmosphere was just indescribably unique. If one team appeared to be stronger than the other, the stronger team would borrow a weaker player from the other team so as to reinforce the latter and ensure that

the game was evenly balanced. If one player happened to rough-tackle the other by mistake, the wronged would remind the culprit to apply the ta’aruf principle.

The principle of ta’aruf was glaringly obvious in all the three games we played. The first game was nothing more than testing the teams’ strength, getting to know each other. It was won convincingly by C’EVAPCICI. The second game was the most peculiar. Even though the teams played to a five all draw, there was no decider after penalty shootout. All players were offered an opportunity to shoot from the penalty spot. Still, nothing could break the deadlock. Just in the nick of time, when we were on the very verge of going for “sudden death”, it dawned on us all that it was not at all about winning and levelling the opponents with the ground. We then all chorused out for the end of the game. And it was unmistakably clear from all players and spectators’ faces that a draw meant a victory for both teams.

Women empowerment

Our last game was the most bizarre and spectacular. The goal we wanted to attain was something unheard of. Knowing that women are made to play second fiddle by most religions and cultures, we decided to use our last game to empower them. Quite amazing!!! Empowerment is a term normally reserved for politics. Male players worked in cahoots and ensured that their female counterparts enjoyed the limelight. Female players were the only ones who were allowed to score goals. All support was funnelled to the achievement of this objective. As all our female players were not privy to this collusion, they were shocked with disbelief by their newfound powerful form. Fuelled by the support they got from male counterparts, they were just in their element and played with an unprecedented amount of passion. Being so energised, they kept on hammering in more and more goals like the football megastars: Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo.

As soon as the last game was over, we all celebrated the victory that both teams had achieved. We were happy that in the three games we played, each team won one, and played the other game to a seven all draw. On average,





the two “arch-rival” teams were level on their points and scores.

It was quite unprecedented, and the memory of football games at Stift Altenburg will linger on longer after our graduation from 2012 VICISU. It appeared like the principles learnt in the lecture halls were taken literally and to the excess. As the students were untiring in their quest to put every principle into practice, the unthinkable was bound to happen.

Conclusion

It is so easy for one to get entranced by the fascinating game of football and become oblivious of the major lessons, which should be drawn from this experience. Of course, we were all intoxicated by the lessons we had imbibed from our lecturers. We were all ready and anxious to bring about change.

How we were able to transmute lessons learnt in the lecture hall into their material equivalent is quite inexplicable. But when you bring students of the VICISU

calibre together, you should not be surprised to see Stift Altenburg monastery becoming a seedbed from which the future world of interreligious tranquillity makes its first roots.

In a nutshell, the game of football has achieved the unthinkable. Not only did it provide a platform for students of different religious beliefs to work together harmoniously, but it also demonstrated to all and sundry that it is possible for people from different religious background to cast their religions aside and work cooperatively for the achievement of a common goal.

In conclusion, the VICISU experience offers hope for the dawn of a new world. If what we witnessed at VICISU were to serve as a precursor of the world to be born, then our hearts should be ready to overflow with hope and optimism. For the new world to come will be one where interreligious coexistence and harmony will be the order of the day. As we return to our respective countries, we carry on our shoulders the responsibility of making that envisaged world become real. ◇



VICISU as Connecting People

by Daud Aziz Khokhar (Pakistan)

Deb Caletti wrote in “The Secret Life of Prince Charming” that “family was a bigger word than I imagined, wide and without limitations, if you allowed it, defying easy definitions...” I left my VICISU colleagues with the same feeling. For me, the lesser the remaining time, the stronger bond we all entered into while we were preparing to leave for our respective countries. I must say that I left my family members of VICISU with the strong faith that we will meet another day and I have no doubts that everyone of us has the same feeling.

This year’s VICISU once again played a pivotal role in connecting people from around the globe, irrespective of ideologies and beliefs, whether political or religious. Apart from academic insights, it leaves an effect on our hearts and minds that will never vanish and will be transmitted as long as this world exists. The notion of peaceful co-existence (one of the basic ideas behind the VICISU)

was taught to us, although I found it deeply entrenched in all of us already.

History evidences the suffering of humanity from the scourge of lethal battles, sometimes in the name of political and sometimes in the name of religious dogmas. VICISU, for me, is meant to bring out the commonalities instead of differences among religions and to promote tolerant and peaceful co-existence between different religions. Human beings have suffered a lot, nations have been separated and countries divided, regionally or even internationally. These unfortunate circumstances many times backlash and embarrass humanity. As for me, the time has changed and in this globalised world, the youth has different perspectives on their ideologies and especially towards others’ ideologies and beliefs. In other words, the youth is much more tolerant and respectful towards ideologies of others. I believe the VICISU may

be a major factor in the process of such transformation. Since its inception, it has already contributed immensely towards making this world a better place to live in.

To conclude, I must say that during my stay with 43 people belonging to different nations and cultures, I found love everywhere around me. I found myself in heaven in these three weeks spent at Stift Altenburg. I must say that the VICISU is indispensable for making this world an ideal and loving place to live in. May God give us strength and determination to implement and practice the ideals we have learnt at the VICISU in each of our own societies! ◇





Creating Pictures

by Karoline Köster (Germany)

It is nearly a month ago that the 43 young people left each other for their home countries saying good-bye. A world tour would be necessary to visit everybody. I was one of those people and now I am thinking about the reasons which made me join the VICISU that gathered us in Stift Altenburg for three weeks. To be honest, I am a bit embarrassed – the reason I joined was to get the credits for my studies, get a bit out of Vienna this summer and maybe meet some nice people. It has turned out to be a lot more than just this.

Since we left each other, our Facebook group is exploding with sheer friendship, love and the hope that the bonds that have been made between us will last forever. If we listen to our minds, we know that such close friendship cannot be kept with everybody. But is this the only thing we kept from our time together in Altenburg? Friendship as precious as gold but not possible to stay forever? I remember Moinuddin with one of his wise comments leading my attention towards something else, something very important. He mentioned responsibility. And yes, I agree, we started to have a responsibility as soon as we became part of this programme. Possibly, it is no less

than to change the world and make it a better place. It is not for us to decide how we use the opportunities we get when meeting people from all over the world, from



different cultures, beliefs and attitudes. It is a duty. We have to include the experiences we made in our lives, in our behaviour and our future. It is our responsibility to make something out of it. This insight hit me hard because I was not sure if I could handle such a responsibility. Moreover, I could not stop asking myself if this made any real sense? 45 people in a monastery somewhere in Lower Austria, talking about religion, human rights, international law – what for? It seemed like trying to eradicate misunderstandings, hate, war and intolerance on a small island nobody cares about. A small drop on a hot stone evaporating within seconds.

But again, I was wrong. It will not be hard for us to accept the duty of changing the world and to act in harmony with what we have learned with and from each other in our time together. We have already started. And I am sure it will influence the world both from little to large. Big changes are achieved by small things, just like thin threads that will slowly form a steady net.

First and foremost, peace and peaceful living together is about knowing each other. At this point, it is important not to forget the multi-nationality we experienced. As Prof. Bsteh reminded us, we were representatives of our home countries in these three weeks. Even if some of us had already travelled a lot, most of the other countries were still unknown to many of us. And we gained knowledge about them just through the few persons from there that formed the picture in your head about this or that one special country.

The lectures we had might have given us interesting and useful information and opened up our thinking, but the more important knowledge we got from each other. Simply from meeting each other and watching each other's behaviour as a Christian, as a Muslim, as an Indonesian, as an Austrian. And by and by, we saw the others not as Christians, Muslims, Indonesians or Austrians, but as friends or as human beings with a unique personality that is as complex as the world itself.

For example, I myself only had a vague idea about Saudi-Arabia as an extravagant country with women being suppressed. For me, it may have been a country in a different world, far away and out of reach. Now, I know three young, powerful and friendly – and by the way, also strikingly beautiful –

women from Saudi-Arabia and they will be what first comes to my mind when hearing or reading something about this country from now on. The picture inside my head changed – now it is full of the spirit and the open mindedness of these three girls. So, somehow countries that seem to be problematic or didn't really matter for us have become countries we start to know because we have met some of their people. And places that seem to us like situated in a different world come closer, and we feel connected through the bonds we have created. Even if all of those bonds do not last forever, the pictures in our minds and hearts will stay. And this is what is happening. It is a step, a thread to change the world – to feel that we all live in the same world. Above all the differences in culture, looks, beliefs or opinions, it is the same ground on which we live on and the same God who created us. Through meeting people from all over the world, the world has come closer to us. And sometimes the world even fits into a dining room. That is what we have to fight for. The three weeks together gave us the basis for achieving such change. Everyone of us experienced changes inside, and these are the thin threads that will connect to form a powerful net. Let's not forget about this time, and change will come about automatically! ◊





Balancing Both Sides – Equation for Co-Existence

by Arsalan Kanwal (Pakistan)

Throughout the course of time, mankind has found itself divided and at each other's throats. No matter what the conflict was and how it started, somehow religion always seemed to lie at the root of it. People always have and still are using religion as a personal excuse of inflicting pain and agony upon others who don't follow the same beliefs as them. But still using religion as a shield to hide man's own abhorrence towards other men gives birth to a very cardinal question, which asks if religion is really behind this impervious behaviour of man or if it is just his own interpretation as an excuse to hide behind the wall of his own desire, not letting anybody through unless they agree to share the same beliefs. And it is the same wall that creates a sense of superiority among men, which later evolves into a blocking tactic that prevents them from being open and ready to learn and live with others. This provokes a thought that maybe all this division and hatred didn't grow from religions but instead from man's own attitude of refusal towards dialogue and human interaction. And, as Oscar Wilde said: "The true mystery

of the world is visible, not the invisible." This means that scarcity of these two very vital ingredients, dialogue and human interaction, within the history of human conflicts is what is preventing us from co-existing.

In the field of finance, there is a principle that states that in order to prosper and grow, a company should get in line both sides of its balance sheet. Maybe it's about time that we as humans apply the same principle to our lives and our single struggle for co-existence.

The VICISU was that three-week-programme that not only found the perfect equilibrium for the Christians and Muslims to co-exist but also embodied the true spirit of balancing both sides. The core message of the Summer University was to understand the true meaning of respect towards other beliefs and thoughts through knowing one's own religion. VICISU was planned to deal with the most important questions of our time, such as how Christians and Muslims may co-exist and how dialogue

could be possible? As we know, the relationship between these two religions has always been questioned, and religious hardliners on both sides have always opposed efforts for co-existence and dialogue. But the organisers of the VICISU took it upon their shoulders to arrange and host such an interactive and intellectually enriching programme. They decided to invite 45 students from 21 countries to take part in an initiative that not just aimed at a dialogue between Christians and Muslims but also involved interaction with many different cultures. Here, the concept of mutual respect was evident throughout the course. Most of our discussions actually introduced us to concepts we had not heard of before. In this erudite way, we learned to be open towards new things about others as well as ourselves. Maybe the key to co-existence is not the way we see ourselves but the way others see us.

The summer university was organised at Stift Altenburg, a beautiful Benedictine monastery situated in a calm and quite town of Altenburg in lower Austria – a place that not only respects but also accepts people from different religions as is evidenced by the beautiful Garden of Religions which was created to show this determination. The whole of Austria is magnificent and enriched with amazing architectural sights and breath taking views, and it is really difficult to explain for me the exquisite and stunning beauty of the Abbey of Altenburg. From the moment I set foot on the grounds of the abbey, I felt such peace and tranquillity that for a moment I could not believe it. On the one side, you see lush green fields with different beautiful flowers, a perfect countryside experience and on the other, you see a thick dense forest that brings out the spirit of an explorer in you. The natural beauty creates an acute sense of serenity and spirituality deep down in one's soul. Certainly, the place itself was a vital factor behind the success of this summer university.

For me, it was my first time meeting so many different and great people in the same place from such diverse

backgrounds and cultures, and it was almost too good to be true to find individuals that are so much apart, yet still on the same wavelength. Through dialogue and interaction it all just synched into a singular struggle of diverse cultures to co-exist in perfect harmony.

We all connected so well on a personal level that it resulted in a bond that only dwells in a family. After a first few days there was no one who felt a stranger or alone – somehow we all felt that we belonged together as if we had known each other for a long time. Of course, the music we made together, the jokes we created, our talks, our late night walks and our laughs, the games we played and the nick names we gave each other, all resulted from the single and simple idea of interaction.

Who knew that this three weeks journey would embark us students from different countries on an adventure that will completely change our lives for the rest of our lives?

For me personally, as a Christian student from Pakistan, it was a great honour to be accepted in such a programme that enabled me to meet such extraordinary individuals and brilliant and bright scholars. And for this chance I, am not only thankful to Prof. Justice (R) Nasira Iqbal for deeming me worthy enough for this inspirational initiative but also the management of VICISU for accepting my application, especially to Prof. Dr. Irmgard Marboe and Prof. Dr. Ingeborg Gabriel for making it possible for students like me to participate in such a multi-cultural and thought provoking Summer University. VICISU evolved from a round table of religious dialogue, and it's really inspiring to see how it is benefitting youth of Christians and Muslims. Bringing them together on a singular platform enables them to experience the true meaning of religious harmony.

The ties made in Austria will always remain with me as long as I live. ◇





Going back to the roots by looking forward

by Fredrick Musindai, Br. Maximilian, OSB (Kenya) and Martina Chudejova (Slovakia)

Dear Friends of VICISU 2012. It is almost a month since we parted ways after an intensive three-week session that has opened new horizons. For us it was a rich experience with new understanding of the importance of dialogue between Muslims and Christians. The experiences shared will go a long way in shaping our world views.

We came across some interesting questions, particularly from our Muslim brothers and sisters who wanted to know if ever there was any meaningful contact between the prophet Muhammad and the Christians. This question lingered in our minds and that is why we thought of writing this article, which we believe will offer an informed response and provoke some intellectual investigations.

Any attempt to study the relationships between Islam and Christianity, or between Muslims and Christians, cannot but go back to the earliest experiences that Muhammad himself had with Christianity and Christians.

This investigation meets the following huddles:

- The religious situation in the area (the Arabian peninsula) before Islam is quite complex. In fact, Arabia was the home of many forms of religions and sects, be they Christian or others. What type of Christians did the prophet know?
- Little documentation is available about Muhammad's activities before his prophetic ministry.
- The Qur'an as a text portrays changing attitudes towards the "people of the book" without telling the causes behind these changes.

Contacts with Christians before his call to prophethood

Muhammad was born around 570 A.D. His father died before his birth and he lost his mother when he was six. He was cared for briefly by his grandfather and then raised by Abu Talib, his uncle, who was a trader and head of the prominent Hashim clan in Mecca.

In the closing decades of the sixth century a thriving trade network spread from Saudi-

Arabia north to Syria, east as far as India, and into northern Africa. Early Muslim histories report that Muhammad travelled with his uncle on trading journeys as far as Syria. It is believed, that given his work as a business man who moved hundreds of kilometres with caravans, Muhammad must have had informal contacts with individual Christians. In Islamic tradition, the most important of these contacts were with two persons:

First, Bahira, a Christian monk in Bosra (Syria). Muhammad, while a young boy of 9-12 years, met this monk who revealed to him his destiny and foretold to the adolescent Muhammad his future as an important religious leader.

Second, Waraqa Ibn Nawfal, a cousin of Khadija, who had converted to Christianity. He is said to have "studied" under the people of the Gospel and the Torah. He could write both in Arabic and Hebrew. He is told to have confirmed Muhammad in his prophetic call after the first vision.

Meccan Period

There were Christians in Mecca; traders and slaves, but living as scattered individuals. Certain elements of Christianity were also circulating in society as can be found in the Qur'an. For example, apocryphal stories about Jesus and Mary, the idea of judgment day, the hereafter and the

notion of angels. There is no indication that Muhammad was in touch with a well-formed Christian community or church. Nevertheless, much of what is known about the Meccan period especially from the Qur'an-ic verses of the time shows that a rather friendly attitude of Muhammad towards the "people of the book" in general (Jews and Christians; see Q. 85: 4-8, 21: 7, 16: 43, and 10: 94).

The Medina period

The dominant theme here are the hostile relationships with the Jewish population of Medina (Q. 2: 40-150). In the later Medina period, there will be indications of contacts with Christians. While we cannot account with precision for what were the contacts between Muhammad and Christians at Medina, we discover a change in attitude towards Christians and Jews: Although there are verses which are more positive towards Christians than they are towards Jews, it is likely that the bad relationships between Jews and the Prophet affected his attitude towards Christians, too. If there are verses which make reference to Jesus, it does not necessarily mean a positive attitude towards Christians. Jesus is referred to as a prophet before Muhammad, since the latter has to be, according to his message, the last of the prophets.

Conclusion

From the beginning of his prophetic mission, Muhammad was convinced that his was a continuation of the mission of biblical prophets. He also had in mind an idea of a Christianity, which would naturally accept his message. The "ideal" Christian community collided with the actual one, provoking ups and downs in the attitude of the prophet towards Christians. We discovered that while Muhammad did meet some Christians, it is questionable whether he had deep knowledge of the Christian doctrine. Nevertheless, what he transmits to his followers about Christians and Christianity is in Islam divinely revealed and can in several ways build a bridge in the dialogue between Muslims and Christians today. ◊



Not to be indifferent

The author of the following text wishes to stay anonymous



Now it is just a few days to the end of the VICISU as I am writing this and I am already missing the memorable moments I have spent here. Before arriving here, I was always concerned with the questions of “how will the others see me, how I am going to see them, what will be thought of the different religious, political and social experiences?” or if there would be a common feeling of “being”? “Will the experience of spending the workshop together make us miss and love each other? And will our shared concerns tie us together?”

And now I am asking myself “has shared reading of the Universal Human Rights Declaration and the Islamic Conventions and laws helped us to have better understanding about human rights?” – Have the courses on “Gender and Religion” and “Religious Minorities” contributed to our perception of discriminations and the ways to alleviate them? And has reviewing experience of pluralism in Indonesia or the return to Islamic rules in Iran given insights into the world around us?

I don’t know how Tachfine, Yasmeen, Pia, Martina or any of the others are feeling? Is their feeling the same as mine? Still, I feel the days we have spent together have definitely changed the meaning of my life. I have come so close to Christina and Irene, with both of whom I have had awesome memories; with Sarah and Tachfine’s questions and curiosity about my country. I will never forget the compassion of Michael and Markus towards the struggle of my people... it will also make me delighted to think back to the vibration of Franziska, Ajla, and Wafa.

The sound of Austrian guitar and music will be with me forever. My conversations with Martina and Kasia

gave me the chance to make them familiar with everyday experiences of mine. The affection of Karoline and Donata was really encouraging. And also, I will never forget the smiles on the faces of Angie and Eva while they were dancing. The beauty of Rita and the brotherhood of David will stay in my mind forever. The work of Professor Marboe, Professor Gabriel and Professor Mayer is still vivid within my mind – I am sure there are many, who are aware of what is going in my country and do all their best to improve the situation. I know for sure that what I have learnt in the course will assist me to take my future steps more single-mindedly and to try and enjoy the idea of human rights in spite of all differences.

I hope my friends will not be indifferent to the problems and pains from which our people suffer, as I can’t be indifferent toward what is going on in theirs. I would be grateful if I ever had the chance to host all of my friends in my country. In fact, this feeling lets me hope and I can dream of peaceful days in all over the world as they were in Altenburg. ◇



In A Small Little Village

by Yasmeen Al-Sawwaf (Saudi-Arabia)



In a small little village that is quite unknown
Many bonds between people throughout the years have grown
Intertwined between the emerald forest’s leaves and vines
Are memoirs and memories that will eternally shine

It begins with strangers from across the lands
Joining together, hand in hand
It begins with observation, tolerance, and curiosity
That evolves into acceptance, friendship, and generosity

Minds interlace like orchids and lilacs in spring
Opinions battle like melodious canaries when they sing
Voices resonate against the hallways and creaky doors
Laughter reaches the ringing bell and marble floors

Many thoughts and dreams have drifted beyond Altenburg’s skies
Countless experiences and tears of nations have shared their goodbyes
The same sapphire heavens have embraced the twinkling stars
And even though the faces underneath change, their light is forever ours

Time fades when true joy swallows you whole
For these friendships have entered my heart and soul, and they linger beyond my control ◇





Kljukuša

from Ajla Omeradzic

Ingredients:

600g of flour
700ml of water
butter
milk
salt
garlic
cottage cheese

Kljukuša is a traditional and well known dish in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's really easy to make, and what's more important, it can be made quickly.

Preparation

- In a bowl put flour, add salt and water. Mix until the mixture is liquid and no lumps of flour. It can be used an electric mixer.
- In a preheated greased bowl add the mixture, bake at 220° C for about 20 minutes.
- While the mixture is fired in another bowl put the butter, milk and a little finely sliced garlic. When the butter has melted, remove from heat. If you are not fond of garlic, you can do it without it.
- When the mixture is cooked, chop into small pieces and place over cheese and pour all the butter, milk and onions.

Enjoy your meal!

Tip*: The best way to check whether the kljukuša is baked, is to use a knife and thrust it into the mixture while baking. If nothing sticks to the knife, it is about cooked.



Saleeg

from Eimanne Al-Rawi (Saudi-Arabia)

*Note: Saudi portions are generous! This is enough to feed 8-10 persons

Preparation

- clean the chicken pieces thoroughly
- boil the chicken with the onion and spices (bay leaves, cardamom, mistak, cinnamon)
- remove the fat from the chicken pot that floats to the surface of the water
- when the chicken is cooked, add a pinch of salt to the stock
- meanwhile, add hot water to the rice and leave it to soak for 1-2 hours
- remove the chicken and the spices from the stock and drain it
- add the rice to the hot chicken stock and place on a medium heat in a large pan
- add more hot water if needed so as to cover the rice fully and cover it with a lid
- when the rice is cooked and is very soft, start pouring the milk
- after having left the rice to simmer and absorb the milk it should now be a thick, "liquidy" mixture
- keep stirring (so as not to stick to the bottom of the pan) and keep the pot on a low heat leaving the milk to absorb fully into the rice while stirring
- meanwhile, stir-fry the cooked chicken pieces with the butter until golden brown or place in a preheated oven after brushing them with butter
- blend the tomatoes, coriander and hot pepper lightly – do not liquefy it!
- squeeze half a lemon into the mixture and add a pinch of salt

OR

- cut the cucumbers and tomatoes into small pieces after which squeeze the lemon and add a pinch of salt
- serve the rice on a large serving dish and add butter on top if desired
- then place the chicken over the rice
- serve the tomato coriander sauce (duggus) or salad in a separate bowl on the side

ENJOY! Bilhana walshi

Ingredients:

1 kg pudding rice
8 chicken pieces (with or without bones)
1 medium sized onion
2 bay leaves
7 cardamoms
5 mistak
1 stick of cinnamon
salt
water
1 1/2 litres milk
butter

Dressing (Duggus):

3 tomatoes
a bunch of coriander
hot pepper (if desired)
half a lemon

OR Salad:

2 cucumbers
2 tomatoes
half a lemon
salt



Quarkkeulchen

from Karoline Köster (Germany)

Ingredients:

- 1/2 kg potatoes
- 250g low fat curd
- 100g flour
- 50g sugar
- 1 egg
- 50g raisins
- 1/2 lemon (not treated, you need the peel)
- oil
- cinnamon, sugar, applesauce

Preparation

- cook the potatoes, peel them and rub them (e.g. through a cheese grater)
- pour hot water over the raisins and leave them for about 20min, they have to macerate
- rub off the peel of the lemon
- mix rubbed potatoes + curd + sugar + egg + raisins + lemon zest
- form small balls out of the dough and flatten them – they should be about 1cm thick and have a diameter of about 7cm
- fry them in oil until they are brown – use enough oil and don't turn the temperature too hot, it needs a bit of time, but then they will not scorch
- serve them with cinnamon and sugar or/and applesauce

ENJOY!



Batata Harra or Chilli Potatoe with Coriander (Cilantro)

from Sarah Shmaitilly (Lebanon)

Preparation

- peel potatoes, wash and cut into bite-size pieces
- fry potatoes in hot oil until light golden brown and remove onto paper towel
- in a pan, on medium heat, add 1 tbsp of oil, chopped garlic, half the chopped coriander, black pepper, salt and chilli pepper, and cook for 3 minutes
- add the potatoes and mix together for 2 minutes, turn heat off then add the remaining coriander and mix
- remove from heat and serve hot

ENJOY!



Ingredients:

- 4 medium size potatoes
- 1 tbsp of chopped garlic
- 2 cups vegetable oil-for frying
- 1/2 cup fresh chopped green coriander (cilantro), or 2 tbsp of dried coriander
- black pepper – as desired
- salt – as desired
- 1 tsp of chilli red pepper powder, or a dash more!





Chicken Korma, Vermicelli, Lassi

from Zainab Iqtidar (Pakistan)

Ingredients:

1000 grams cut-up bone-less chicken

300 grams yogurt

5 cloves garlic (make a paste in the grinder by adding some water)

5 medium onions, chopped

2 tbsp of chopped fresh ginger (make a paste in the grinder by adding some water)

1 tsp paprika

2 tsp ground coriander

3/4 tsp ground red chilli

3/4 tsp salt

2 pinches ground black pepper

1 tsp ground cumin

seeds of 2 peeled cardamom pod

1 teaspoon ground poppy seed

1 teaspoon turmeric

1 bay leaf

2 tablespoon fresh coriander, chopped

6 tablespoons of vegetable oil

Chicken Korma - Preparation

- chop the onions and put them in the pan with the 4 tbsp of oil; when they turn brown, take them out and crush them, leave the oil in the pan
- add all the spices enlisted above in one glass of water
- add 2 more tbsp of oil to the oil remaining in the pan and add the garlic paste and the ginger paste; when this begins to simmer, add the mixture of spices; continue to use to a long spoon for mixing everything; constant stirring is required
- now add the chicken; allow it to cook for about 10 minutes; stir a little to change sides so that the chicken gets cooked evenly
- when the chicken appears to be a little cooked and changes colour to light brown, add the yogurt and one more glass of water
- when the mixture becomes fully heated again, add the crushed onions
- adding one tablespoon of pickles is optional, you may add it if you like pickles; otherwise the dish can still be made without it
- allow the curry to cook for another 5 minutes, with constant stirring, and then serve in a dish; garnish with fresh coriander leaves (chopped)

Vermicelli - Preparation

- pour the milk and the sugar in a pan
- stir constantly to dissolve all the sugar; do this at medium heat
- the milk will become sweet, and a little thicker than before
- once all the sugar is dissolved add the vermicelli; increase the heat a little
- allow the vermicelli to cook until the milk boils; then mix everything in the pan, allow it to settle; do this three times
- pour out in a dish and refrigerate (Do Not Freeze!) for about 15 minutes; serve cold; can be garnished with almonds and raisins

Lassi - Preparation

- put the yogurt in the mixer/grinder along with the sugar
- add a little milk
- mix until the yogurt appears to get a little thinner
- now continue to add milk and mix until you achieve the consistency (thick or thin) that you would like for your drink

Ingredients:

fist full of "foot long" vermicelli pasta

0.5 litres of milk

4 tbsp of sugar (you can add more if you like it to be sweeter)

Ingredients:

250 grams yogurt

one glass of milk (about 250 millilitre)

4 tbsp of sugar (you can more if you would like it to be sweeter)



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