EDITORIAL

One of the regular features of this journal is to reflect on the current state of interfaith relations, particularly amongst Jews, Christians and Muslims. These articles are largely based on lectures delivered at the annual Jewish–Christian–Muslim Student Conference (JCM) held for thirty years at the Hedwig Dransfeld Haus (HDH) in Bendorf, Germany. Several of the shorter articles in this issue come from this source, representing three years of the programme. The theme of the 2001 conference was ‘Education within our faith communities: what do we learn and what do we teach about ourselves and about others?’, and is addressed by Laura Janner-Klausner, Jacobus Schoneveld and Halima Krausen. The theme for 2002 was ‘The religious challenge of living between cultures’ and is addressed by Michael Pertz, Rainer Irmgedruth and Humera Khan. The theme for 2003 was ‘Interreligious dialogue in conflict situations’ and is addressed by Harvey Hames, Marten Marquardt and Hamideh Mohagheghi. What is missing is the lively debate sparked off by them that takes place in many contexts within the conference – discussion groups, workshops, religious services and informal encounters.

Those who have attended the JCM conference know it as ‘the Bendorf Conference’, and there is now a certain poignancy in this title. This past year we learnt that the longstanding precarious financial situation of the HDH had finally had its effect and the Haus was declared bankrupt and closed. At the time of writing attempts are being made to reorganize the finances and perhaps reopen the Haus as an interfaith centre, but in the meantime the next conference in the series has been moved to a temporary new home. It remains to be seen whether the same impact can be obtained in a place that lacks the atmosphere and sensitivities built up over such a long period.

The pioneering aspect of this particular conference is highlighted in the article by Karl-Josef Kuschel in his laudatory speech delivered when the Conference was awarded the Hermann Maas Medal of the town of Gengenbach as a tribute to its many significant innovations and dimensions. We add the responses by Ute Stamm, coworker at the Haus throughout most of the time of the Conference, Chadigah Kissel, representing the Deutsche Muslim Liga (Bonn), one of the participating organisations, and Rabbi Professor Jonathan Magonet, one of the Conference’s initiators and supporters throughout its existence.

One of the organising team of the Conference in recent years, Amira Abdin, is a Palestinian woman who has lectured regularly on Islam at the Leo Baeck College – Centre for Jewish Education and has recently been made an honorary fellow of the College. She writes on ‘Love in Islam’.

Interfaith dialogue was originally viewed with suspicion and was often seen as something for a few people on the margins of their own religious community. However, the work of theologians like Hans Küng and activists like Sir Sigmund Sternberg, and of international organisations like the World Conference for Religion and Peace and the International Council of Christians and Jews, has done much to raise the profile and extend participation in such activity. Nevertheless much scepticism remains about its legitimacy and effectiveness. Certainly the forces that lead to polarization between religious groups seem to have become more dominant, or so it would seem from popular media coverage, which tends to focus on conflicts within and between religious communities. It will often simplistically link these to global terrorism, and feed the demonization, in particular, of Muslims. But since the media reflect back to us what we expect or desire, this negativity is clearly a given in today's world. It is therefore helpful to be challenged by Claus Leggewie's ten-point critique of dialogue, which points to failures that need to be addressed. As someone who has made a valuable study of Islam in Europe today, he was invited to play the devil's advocate at a major interfaith session at the 2003 Ecumenical Kirchentag in Berlin.

The parallels between antisemitism and Islamophobia are addressed by Lord Nazir Ahmed, the first Muslim peer in the U.K., in a lecture delivered at the World Jewish Congress in Jerusalem. The escalation of both these perversions in the intervening years gives added urgency to his comments. The immediacy of such issues is well brought out in a sermon given by Rabbi Elizabeth Tikvah Sarah following a couple of examples from the U.K. of careless and insensitive public statements by a politician and journalist.

Danny Burkeman tackles an asymmetry in Jewish-Christian dialogue, which is often perceived as being more important to Christians than to Jews. Moreover, all too often, essentially religious questions posed by Christians seem to encounter essentially political responses from Jews, a reflection of the different relationship between religious faith and peoplehood in the two religions. He draws particular attention to the publication in 2000 of *'Dabru emet: a Jewish statement on Christians and Christianity'* and the debates it has sparked as an important attempt to redress some of these imbalances.

Still in the area of interfaith, Mark Winer's van der Zyl Memorial Lecture reflects the views of a longterm American activist in the field of Jewish-Christian relations.

The previous issue was devoted to the subject of Jewish museums throughout Europe. For technical reasons an important article on the history of the Jewish Museum in Prague by Dirk Rupnow had to be held over and we are pleased to be able to include it in this issue.

From time to time we have published papers that explore some aspect of Jewish traditional thought, and we continue the practice with the paper by Gil

Nativ – a visiting fellow at Leo Baeck College – Centre for Jewish Education – on a Biblical issue, the vexed relationship between King Saul and King David, as viewed in rabbinic thought.

The death of Dorothee Soelle, a groundbreaking figure in postwar German religious thought, is a great blow. Albert Friedlander, a long time friend, offers here a brief memorial note.

As usual we complete the issue with poetry and book reviews.

Jonathan Magonet

With great sorrow we record the death of Rabbi Dr Albert Friedlander z'l, co-editor of *European Judaism*, on 8 July 2004. Fuller tributes will appear in the next edition.