EDITORIAL

The year 2014 marked the formal celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the International Student Conference of the Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe, JCM for short. The longest-running such 'trialogue' programme in Europe, it developed out of the initiative of Rabbi Lionel Blue and Pastor Winfried Maechler in the period before the outbreak of the Six-Day War. They argued that beyond the political entities of Israel and the Arab States were the three great monotheistic religions, and surely within them were the necessary spiritual resources to create reconciliation. What was particularly imaginative was the aim to organize a conference for 'theology students' of the three faiths, future leaders of their respective communities who would bring to their congregational responsibilities interfaith perspectives, experience and values, as well as a network of colleagues from the other faiths to work with. From its inception the aim was to work primarily within the European context, recognizing very early the growth of Muslim communities and the need for their integration. An early decision was made not to address the Middle East conflict directly but only insofar as it impacted on the local diaspora communities.

The JCM student conference itself began at Hedwig Dransfeld Haus (HDH), Bendorf, thanks to the far-sighted vision of the Haus's director, Anneliese Debray. That same locale also saw the creation of the Annual International Jewish-Christian Bible Week which is featured in this issue. The history of the Bendorf years of both conferences is the subject of a doctoral dissertation by Daniella Koeppler, subsequently published as *Zelte der Begegnung*. Following the closure of HDH, both conferences found new locations: the JCM in Wuppertal, hosted by the United Evangelical Mission's Centre for Mission and Leadership Studies, and the *Bibelwoche*, now in its forty-seventh year, in Haus Ohrbeck, Georgsmarienhütte, near Osnabrück.

The editor's involvement with the JCM student conference from its inception is recorded in this issue in a memoir, which was presented at the anniversary celebration, alongside brief reflections on the same occasion from Irit Burkeman, Stefan Hartmann and Halima Krausen, long-time members of the conference-organizing team. The topic of the anniversary conference, 'Dialogue and Beyond', was intended to look towards future challenges and opportunities, and is addressed here in articles by the editor, Jutta Beldermann and Humera Khan.

The issue opens with a Jewish perspective on the development of Jewish-Christian dialogue over the past fifty years provided by Fred Morgan. He explores the significant but contrasting views of Joseph B. Soloveitchik and

Abraham Joshua Heschel, other contemporary thinkers and responses to *Dabru Emet*, the first cross-denominational Jewish attempt at a theological statement about Christianity. As he argues, ‘it becomes incumbent on us to give dialogue a significant theological weight which is appropriate to the twenty-first century’.

The Bible Week is built around the morning study groups which address the particular set of texts for the year, in this case Book Four of the Book of Psalms (Psalms 90–106). Only three formal lectures are given, two of which offer respectively a Jewish and a Christian perspective on the text. The article by Annette Boeckler in this issue provides an overview of the use of the many Psalms in this collection that have a major role within Jewish liturgy, and Susan Gillingham shows some of their interconnections and their reception in Christian tradition. The third lecture in Bible Week may look at the texts from a different perspective entirely – literature, art, music, history or psychology, as appropriate. Benjamin Williams presents a fascinating historical example of indirect Jewish–Christian ‘dialogue’ by illustrating how an early printed edition of rabbinic commentaries, with personal annotations by the Jewish owner, Aaron Hasson, a scholar active in Salonica in the second half of the sixteenth century, entered the library and subsequent commentaries of Edward Pococke, the seventeenth-century Laudian Professor of Arabic and Regius Professor of Hebrew at the University of Oxford.

The attacks on Jewish communities in Europe at the time of writing this editorial, with major public tragedies in Belgium, Denmark and France, not to mention countless smaller and less publicized ones, at the hands of extremists claiming to act out of their Muslim commitment, are a reminder of how prescient was the decision to seek to develop the Jewish–Christian–Muslim dialogue those forty years ago. Tragically the many examples of good relations between synagogues, churches and mosques, mutual support in difficult circumstances and good neighbourliness are overshadowed by the attention-grabbing acts of violence which are heralded by some as proof that the dialogue is not ‘effective’ or is even misguided. Yet faith communities are valuable building blocks of civil society, and interfaith dialogue represents one of the few ideological counterpoints to extremism, be it religious or, as increasingly the case in Europe, nationalistic. One takes some comfort from the adage attributed to Rabbi Tarfon: ‘It is not for you to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it’ (Pirkei Avot 2:21).

This issue is completed with book reviews.

Jonathan Magonet