

EDITORIAL

If it is fifty years since the creation of the State of Israel, it is just over thirty years since the Six-Day War. While the former date marks the formal beginning of the State, the latter was the moment when Israel, its vulnerability and its power, affected the consciousness of Jews everywhere. It galvanised diaspora communities, gave the impetus to the movement for the right to emigrate from the Soviet Union, and created a new sense of Jewish pride. It also changed the physical geography of the State and the psychological geography as well. The West Bank and Jerusalem dropped out of Messianic dream worlds into tangible realities, but at the same time became caught up in the new inflated mythology and fantasy world of 'greater Israel', of Jewish power and control, which we are gradually beginning to recognise and 'deconstruct'.

One tiny consequence of that war was the coming together of a group of Rabbis and Christian clergy, partners in Jewish-Christian dialogue, who asked whether it might be possible to seek beyond the politics of national states in the Middle East some kind of reconciliation amongst the three great religious traditions to which in subtle and complex ways they belonged. Out of their deliberations and experiments was created the Standing Conference of Jews, Christians and Muslims in Europe (JCM), a suitably vague designation for an organisation that virtually only exists when it holds conferences. Under the guidance of Rabbi Lionel Blue, Pastor Winfried Maechler of the Evangelische Akademie, Berlin, Sister Louis Gabriel a.k.a. Dr Charlotte Klein of the Sisters of Zion, Fr Gordian Marshall, the late Salah Eid and Dr Smail Balic, the first JCM conferences were held in Berlin. Later the Hedwig Dransfeld Haus in Bendorf, near Koblenz, under its Director Anneliese Debray, became the host for what was to become the annual Jewish-Christian-Muslim Student Conference, co-sponsored by the Leo Baeck College. Our collaboration with the House has been maintained, thanks in particular to Frau Ute Stamm, and this year we celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the conference.

Aimed initially at theology students from the three faiths, the conference expanded to include community and social workers, teachers and others who have a leadership role within their respective communities. From the beginning it was felt necessary to restrict the work to issues affecting our three faith communities in Europe – though inevitably the Middle East situation was included insofar as it had an impact on the communities in Europe. A similar conference for women began a few years later.

In time the JCM student conference has become a point of reference that past participants and others use to encourage similar initiatives. It is a safe

space in which individuals can explore the implications of such challenging dialogue on their personal lives and the lives of their communities.

We welcome a number of new initiatives in the UK in recent years: a Muslim initiative, the Calamus Foundation, created by Saba and Risal Risaluddin; the Maimonides Foundation, created by the late Rabbi Hugo Gryn together with Lord Janner, Dr David Khalili and Dr Richard Stone; and the Three Faiths Forum, initiated by Sir Sigmund Sternberg and Dr Zaki Badawi; as well as the Abrahamic Forum of the International Council for Christians and Jews. They are evidence of the growing commitment to this kind of activity.

This issue contains two sets of lectures derived from two recent JCM conferences in Bendorf. Rabbi Jeffrey Newman, Karen Armstrong and Dr A.N. Elias explore the attitudes of their respective faiths to war; Deborah Myers-Weinstein, Annegret Möllers and Mohammed Gulbar examine in very personal ways the subtle question of identity today in a changing, pluralistic European society. We have kept the texts in the sometimes colloquial style in which they were delivered.

A very different initiative for interfaith dialogue was set in motion by Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan and the Duke of Edinburgh. In seeking a way to bring about reconciliation they convened a meeting at St George's House, Windsor which set in its train a series of conferences, alternating between Jordan and the UK, where theologians, academics and members of the business community have met to work out areas of commonality. One product was a statement on shared business ethics between the three faiths, published in this journal in the autumn 1994 issue (94/2). Now constituted as the 'Interfaith Foundation', with Sir Evelyn de Rothschild as the third 'patron', the 1996 meeting in the series, the 'Chartridge conference', was on the theme of 'religion and nationalism' with papers by Michael Billig, Keith Clements and Saad Eddin Ibrahim.

As part of its 40th anniversary celebrations Leo Baeck College honoured Crown Prince Hassan by awarding him its Interfaith Award and we are proud to print his stirring and moving response as someone who has committed himself to the challenge of dialogue. British royalty features also in this issue. The commitment of HRH Prince Charles to a better understanding of Islam in the West is well expressed in his paper delivered at the Wilton Park conference.

If the Six-Day War had not triggered the quest for reconciliation between the three 'Abrahamic Faiths', then the tragic events in the former Yugoslavia would have done so. For here was a society within the heart of Europe, with a history of tolerance and mutual respect amongst the different faith communities, that broke apart in an orgy of violence, cruelty and destruction. The article by Ahmed Zilic, an activist in the quest for justice and reconciliation in Bosnia, examines the complex interactions that contributed to this tragic ongoing prob-

lem. In the Documentation we publish a remarkable statement of shared moral commitment from representatives of the different faith communities involved.

There are many celebrations and re-evaluations throughout the world to mark the 50th anniversary of Israel. Three articles in this issue reflect on the ongoing difficulties of the situation in the Middle East and the political and personal insensitivities that need to be overcome. Albert Friendlander reports on two conferences that mark the centenary of the first Zionist Congress, the historical background and the current tensions that mark virtually every aspect of Israeli life. Judith Elkan writes as a child psychotherapist working with Palestinian colleagues. Irit Burkeman gives a more personal evaluation of the experience of an Israeli abroad, tied emotionally to the country yet concerned with its current direction.

The Documentation includes a listing of the themes of the twenty-five years of JCM conferences as well as information on the newly-founded Three Faiths Forum. As usual the volume is completed with poetry and book reviews.

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