

Navid Kermani 2015

Conferment speeches
Peace Prize of the German Book Trade 2015
Sunday, October 18, 2015

Lanier 2014
Alexijewitsch 2013
Liao 2012
Sansal 2011
Grossman 2010
Magris 2009
Kiefer 2008
Friedländer 2007
Lepénies 2006
Pamuk 2005
Esterházy 2004
Sontag 2003
Achebe 2002
Habermas 2001
Djebar 2000
Stern 1999
Walser 1998
Kemal 1997
Vargas Llosa 1996
Schimmel 1995
Semprún 1994
Schorlemmer 1993
Oz 1992
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Havel 1989
Lenz 1988
Jonas 1987
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Paz 1984
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Kopelew 1981
Cardenal 1980
Menuhin 1979
Lindgren 1978
Kołakowski 1977
Frisch 1976
Grosser 1975
Frère Roger 1974
The Club of Rome 1973
Korczak 1972
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Myrdal 1970
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Sachs 1965
Marcel 1964
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Tillich 1962
Radhakrishnan 1961
Gollancz 1960
Heuss 1959
Jaspers 1958
Wilder 1957
Schneider 1956
Hesse 1955
Burckhardt 1954
Buber 1953
Guardini 1952
Schweitzer 1951
Tau 1950

Peter Feldmann, Lord Mayor of the City of Frankfurt

Greeting

On behalf of the City of Frankfurt, I would like to welcome you to the Church of St. Paul - this landmark of German democracy - and to the ceremony awarding the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to Navid Kermani. Today, 720,000 people live in Frankfurt, a city that is home to members of all the religions of the world. Indeed, of the over 190 nations across the globe, 180 nations are represented here. In fact, Frankfurters thrive as a result of the cosmos of their city. And it is surely no coincidence that Frankfurt hosted the "25 Years of German Unity" celebrations for three days only a couple of weeks ago. Germany is good at integration; and Frankfurt does it especially well. To be sure, we do it differently than in Berlin and certainly a bit differently than in the tranquil state capital of Wiesbaden. But we do it - in our own colorful, loud and international way.

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In 1989, the challenge facing a newly unified Germany was to bring together the two-thirds of the population that lived in the West with the one-third that lived in the East. Today's German reality reflects the challenge of bringing together the two-thirds of the population with German ancestry with the one-third of the population that has its roots in another country or culture. The decisive project of our generation is European unity: a unity of values, our values, which include inalienable human rights, the rule of law and, of course, representative democracy.

In consequence of the horrific events in the Middle East, these values are being put to a serious test.

Indeed, at the moment, we are experiencing a stress test of our values. We are being called upon to defend these values as clearly and as thoroughly as possible. Only then will we be able to convince the people who are currently fleeing to our shores - as well as those choosing to remain in their countries of origin - to join us in fostering societies that are based on freedom and tolerance.

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Mr. Kermani, in the past week, you have expressed concern about the extent to which Europe is behaving in a disunited manner and showing a distinct lack of solidarity in this situation. One of the rights for which people have risked their lives for centuries in Europe is the right to freedom of expression.

This year's Peace Prize recipient knows from his own life experience how precious this right is. We thank him for making use of this right in such a bold, tireless and radical manner. We admire and support your efforts. Dear Mr. Kermani! Congratulations on receiving the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade!

Translated by the Hagedorn Group.

Heinrich Riethmüller, President, German Publishers and Booksellers Association

Greeting

*You walk above in the light,
Weightless tread a soft floor, blessed geni!
Radiant the gods' mild breezes
Gently play on you
As the girl artist's fingers
On holy strings.*

*Fateless the Heavenly breathe
Like an unweaned infant asleep;
Chastely preserved
In modest bud
For ever their minds
Are in flower
And their blissful eyes
Eternally tranquil gaze,
Eternally clear.*

*But we are fated
To find no foothold, no rest,
And suffering mortals
Dwindle and fall
Headlong from one
Hour to the next,
Hurled like water*

Translation by Michael Hamburger

In his poem "Hyperion's Song of Fate," Friedrich Hölderlin – an important presence in my life in Tübingen as well as in Navid Kermani's – repeatedly evokes the notion of the suffering of the world, particularly in contrast to the gods who walk "on a soft floor." He reminds us of the fate of mortals, which is merely to endure the full weight of life, unable to control it, unable to take it into our hands, to be but a plaything of the gods. Today, because we no longer believe in "the gods," the suffering of the world has taken on a different dimension for any enlightened and politically minded individual. While Hölderlin was able to complain that mortals on earth were fatefully doomed to suffer because the gods had determined so, we "modern non-believers" know that we can no longer blame any other, supernatural forces for causing the suffering.

In fact, mortals themselves are responsible for the world's suffering and thus also for our suffering from the world. We can no longer claim to not know; we can no longer claim that life is subject to fate. Instead, we must face up to our responsibilities, be-

cause never before have we witnessed more of the misfortunes of the world than today. We are informed about everything. One terrible news item follows the next. Images of wars, refugees and catastrophes are delivered to our living rooms every day. Against this backdrop, ignorance is no longer a valid excuse; instead, we are confronted with the allegation that we are consciously looking the other way.

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As an author moving in various guises – explorer, academic, human being – Navid Kermani has investigated and deeply acquainted himself with different cultures and at least two world religions by means of gathering his own, hands-on experience. The result is an impressive oeuvre consisting of speeches, essays and academic books, but also of novels that invite us to understand him and his points-of-view, and also to analyze our own opinions and cross-examine our own judgments and prejudices. Kermani explores worlds and perspectives that many would argue are foreign to one another, only to reveal just how much the world's major religions are indeed deeply connected to one another. And, finally, he proposes alternatives for our peaceful coexistence, all the while knowing that this would be an almost unfathomable undertaking.

Our world needs role models; people who provide us with orientation, who show that it is worth it to get involved and stand up for each other. People who prove that peace and freedom can only succeed if we look beyond our own immediate horizon, that is, if we become actively involved and if we are prepared to stand up for freedom against any of its internal and external enemies.

For all of us on the Board of Trustees of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, Navid Kermani is such a man. He is an enlightened citizen, one who loves Hölderlin and poetry, and who draws from literature and his own religiosity the inspiration, insight, and strength we all need in light of a world that has seemingly come apart at the seams.

Ladies and gentlemen, Germany's publishing and bookselling community is extremely proud to be awarding its Peace Prize to Navid Kermani. Indeed, it is a privilege to honor this sincere cosmopolitan who is committed to tolerance, openness and peace. And it is to him that we extend our warmest congratulations today.

Translated by the Hagedorn Group.

Norbert Miller

Faith in Words – Trust in Images. Navid Kermani's Explorations of West-Eastern Peace

Laudatory speech

As "The Novel I'm Writing" ("Der Roman, den ich schreibe") headed towards its first and – how could it be any another way? – only temporary ending, the publisher of this gigantic tome was deeply moved and took recourse to a Bavarian figure of speech to express his admiration: Michael Krüger knew that the "meal" he had just ingested, which consisted of *very* different ingredients mixed together, seasoned and refined by the author at whim, would present itself to readers as "a real Knödel" – literally a boiled dumpling. Krüger did not refine his culinary interpretation any further than that. And, indeed, the aim of the author lies quite close to this prosaic description of his book, especially when Kermani refers to it – persistently, and with good reason – as a *novel*, a fiction, a play of imagination that reaches into the unknown and whose hero "is named Navid Kermani in some places."

The author cites Thursday, June 8, 2006, 11:18 am as the beginning of a new phase in his life and simultaneously as the first sentence of the *novel to be written*. On Saturday, June 11, 2011, at 10:15 am, as he waits in vain in front of the closed doors of a Presbyterian church in Los Angeles, the author also knows that this *random* moment marks the instant in which there is irrevocably no space left in the book for addenda. And he underlines this with the meticulousness of an accountant: the present action is the writing present, and it contains everything that the real-fictitious author Kermani experiences, imagines and invents for his own purposes in these five years, including the crisis of his marriage, the separation from his children as well as his confrontation with political events and his travels to conflict areas in the Near and Far East. They are just as inherent to the plot structure of this open-ended novel as the reading of Adorno – sometimes even Heidegger – and the discoveries that our author-reader and Persian poetry connoisseur makes in Hölderlin's verse and in the novels of Jean Paul – that lone Levantine lead in German lyrical poetry.

All of this flows into the vast river of narration: for example, many of the reportages of his trips to a troubled world that emerged concurrently between 2006 and 2009, feed into chapters in the novel. In contrast, in 2008 – a year that was so important for his literary development – in the Romanic-style Villa Massimo, a couple of the artistic awakenings he ex-

perienced at the foot of Caravaggio's baroque altar images managed to loosen themselves from the bonds of the diary-novel and were published on their own. The reflections on Hölderlin and Jean Paul ultimately formed the basis of his Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics. These reflections preceded the publication of the novel; indeed, when they were published one year after the book, the title under which they were published revealed them to be part of the ongoing project: "Jean Paul, Hölderlin und der Roman, den ich schreibe" ("Jean Paul, Hölderlin and the Novel I'm Writing"). At this moment in time, however, the novel already bore the new and unloved title "Dein Name" ("Your Name"). This act of clinging to the process of writing as the concept of life embodied by the author Kermani – working against finiteness – also comprises in itself all future utterances. They are all, to this day, part of a *roman à faire*.

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The dominant figure lurking behind the ever-present bars forged by these family tragedies is the grandfather. As a bank director from Isfahan who trusted in the idea of bourgeois advancement – and, as the head of a family rooted deeply in age-old Islamic traditions – this man has a tremendous influence on the thoughts and memory of his grandson. How was it possible, as a deeply devout Muslim, to be a vocal champion of the British constitution and education system? And, from his social position, how was it possible to maintain a balance of progress and tradition – of enlightenment and certainty in one's faith – without gradually assimilating with the West?

When reflecting on cultural and political catastrophes, Kermani always comes back to the lived utopia of this patriarch, to his hope of finding a sustainable and common new beginning for two religions born of the same soil. The unassuming notebooks – which went unnoticed by the family and in which the grandfather recorded his thoughts and memories – became an obligation for the grandson; indeed, they became a kind of preliminary draft for the book that was *to be written*. The grandfather's era – one the grandson knows only from these notes and from stories, and perhaps also from the grandfather's writing style – also shape his perception when he turns his gaze not to the early, comparably intact world of Iran, but to the distorted present day. Much of the

grandfather's optimism that grace will conquer any hopeless situation seems to have rubbed off on this rather more skeptical chronicler, except he speaks of chance. He is convinced that only a mutually held belief in the common core of two religions so abruptly divorced can afford our modern society the chance of a new beginning. In this, too, the author takes conscious recourse to the grandfather. And so, at the first Frankfurt Lectures on Poetics on May 11, 2010, the huge book was still titled "Das Leben seines Großvaters" ("The Life of His Grandfather"), even though the grandfather appears as an active character only relatively late in the work.

Ultimately, and above all, the novel is "at its core, a 'book of the dead.' It commemorates the people in my life who die. I doubt whether the dead need someone to preserve their name. While writing my book, I learned that it is *we* who need them, that something in us dies when we don't invoke them: the life that we shared with them." Much like in the novels of Jean Paul and other authors he admired, the shadows of those who were close to him and then departed while he was still writing move past him in long rows. And they do so with ominous frequency: István Eörsi, the actress Claudia Fenner, the Islamic scholar Friedrich Niewöhner, to whom he was close thanks to the generosity that informed even their disputes, the uncle Djavad Ketabi and the composer György Sandor Ligeti, whom he admired at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin. At irregular intervals, these memorials and commemorative pages accompany the novel that continues to write itself, further expanding the perspectives. For example, the old Frankfurt carpenter who installs a desk for the bourgeois Kermani insists that "he really did exist; he has to have existed, seeing as he's dead now. In the novel that I'm writing, only the dead are *real*; all of the others are only 'ideal,' which I put in quotation marks because Hölderlin saw the ideal as the only thing that was real. When somebody dies, the author of the novel says 'I.'"

The *novelist* Kermani continues to hold fast to this today. Indeed, in an acceptance speech at an awards ceremony last year, he mentioned five names; names that have now moved out of the virtual realm into the reality of memory. In this way, that which had to remain a fragment in the novel now clearly forms a thread of continuity in the writing of his own life: "Because it must attempt to be complete, the book of the dead only ends with one's own death."

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Kermani did not decide in favor of Adorno and the Frankfurt School, which would have been fitting considering his philosophical tendencies; instead, he

chose a course of studies that would do justice to his life and thought in two cultural circles. While he began writing at a remarkably early age for the Feuilleton section of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, he pursued Islamic Studies in the field of Middle Eastern Studies and received his doctorate in 1998 in Bonn with his work "Gott ist schön. Das ästhetische Erleben des Quran" ("God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran"). Treading lengthy paths through often fantastical traditions but also engaging in a precise examination of the Quran's reception – one that is renewed daily – and its effect on the faithful, he proves a seemingly simple, obvious thesis: "The Quran presents the doctrine of the *igaz*, [the miraculous character of the Muslim revelation] as being formally too excellent to have been written by a man, too artistic to be a work of art, stylistically too original to be an invention, and too beautiful to be explained by anything other than the work of the divine. This line of reasoning, which continues to this day to be the most important pillar of the proof of the miracle, relies intrinsically on aesthetic premises."

In other words, the special position of the Quran among the holy scriptures of all monotheistic religions is ascribed to the aesthetic perfection of the text – one that can only be attributed to Allah. Moses as the author of the Pentateuch, the four Evangelists as witnesses of Jesus' work on earth, the visionary of the apocalypse – these are all divinely inspired announcers of divine will. Mohammed – the prophet called upon by Allah – only seemingly belongs in this series, for he wrote down the one-hundred-and-fourteen Surah and thus made them binding. However, he is not the *author* of the perfection of the Quran, which is a perfection that goes beyond man. Instead, Mohammed is the voice, the medium through which God speaks to the people. This is why the glory of each verse – lived out and repeated thousands of times every day by the faithful – is the most perfect proof of the existence of God.

Unfortunately, my synopsis of Kermani's basic idea leaves out how brilliantly and with what broadly drawn arches he places the relationship of the Prophet and his inspiration to poetry, but also to the literature and the aesthetics of the West. Nor does it reflect how expertly he, in the concluding prose hymn, evokes the omnipotence of Allah's Surahs, which are known intimately by each believer, and which unfold in their ritual recitation in the Mosque: "No one responded with more enthusiasm – and yet also with more fear – to the euphony of the divine speech than the Sufis, the mystics of Islam (...). A recurring image in its lines is the pious man who sinks down, overwhelmed by the Quran. His figure is a role model, even in the manner of his extinguishing." Nothing disturbed Kermani more, when he returned to the

Cairo of his student years, than the disappearance of the previously ubiquitous Quran recitations, in which each person was able to come together in the truth of the community via their own very different perception of the divine word.

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The second work of this *Orientalist*, published in 2005, was entirely devoted to the relationship between literature and the experience of God: "Der Schrecken Gottes. Attar, Hiob und die metaphysische Revolte" ("The Terror of God: Attar, Job and the Metaphysical Revolt"), with the intent of creating a monograph about a work written by Faridoddin Attar, one of the seven classical poets of Persia, called "Buch der Leiden" ("Book of Sufferings"), which is "probably one of the darkest works ever in world literature." Indeed, Attar's poetry takes up the question posed by Job as to why God so often subjects the faithful and the pious to immeasurable suffering. Can the Almighty betray his own righteousness? Goethe took up this theme - the game played by the Creator with his creations - in the wager with the devil in the prologue in heaven and used it as the framework of his "Faust." Kermani, on the other hand, depicts the existential distress of this question - which he brings back entirely into the private realm - in the form of the suffering of his pious aunt, whose pain he must watch helplessly, much like Job's reporter.

Kermani had already thematized the incomprehensible horror of God at the end of his first book, most likely based on the same experience and using his usual approach of interdependence. Here he repeats the question, this time as a student and dragoman of the great poet Attar. Much like Dante at the beginning of the *Commedia*, Attar, too, stands in the "Book of Sufferings" as a *thought wanderer* at the precipice of a mystical journey of the soul upon which he seeks to penetrate remote realms of the universe in thoughts and dreams. Forty days of Quran meditation and prayer provide the framework for this pilgrimage inspired by the rapture of the Prophet. A Pir or tutor explains the spiritual experiences to the disciple, be they uplifting or frightening, much like one hundred years later, in the "Divine Comedy," first Vergil and then the Virgin Mary would interpret the stations and relate them to Dante. The persecutions of God as well as their inherent justification pass by the hereafter-journeyman in a seemingly endless series and in many verses, and Attar illustrates the paradox of how it is possible that the two - the supplication to God and the accusation against him - could fit together: "See how the creatures, in the face of their destruction, cling lovingly to God, not *in spite of*, but rather *because* they pronounce him guilty."

The beauty and the horror of God: the connection of the two works creates an image whose relevance extends far beyond academia; an image of an Islamic conceptual world that is enhanced by the wealth of the essays and war reporting issued by the man we are honoring today. *Westöstliche Erkundungen* (*West-Easter Inquiries*) is the name the reporter Kermani gives to a comprehensive volume of his essays. In a work that carries the ironically fragmented title "Ausnahmezustand. Reisen in eine beunruhigte Welt" ("State of Emergency. Travels in a Troubled World"), individual episodes are used to depict a situation that is ongoing. It is under this title that we can summarize all of the books in which he traces the changes taking place in the political situation in the Middle East and increasingly also the practiced relationship between the three monotheistic religions.

Kermani always surprises us by providing inconspicuous, spoken clues to elucidate circumstances that would otherwise be hard to understand. And at every turn, we feel the involvement of the witness, his often helpless willingness to be a friend. Separated by five years, Kermani's two essays on Afghanistan create the temporal panorama of a downfall calculated for eternity. In 2011, what could have been described in 2006 as the grim normality of an isolated protective power has moved beyond any attempt to decipher it from outside and become the half-organized chaos of a long-since forgotten conflict. No cipher could depict the gruesomeness more powerfully than the carefully furnished tent of Nur Agha - young even in his old age - who lost his wife and all five kids twenty years ago in a bombing and now, at the age of 81, lives in a cemetery with a shorn sheep and a radio recorder. There is no sentimentality here, as is always the case with Kermani, even though he goes beyond the borders of what is reportable! And yet, anyone who has read his books senses in this scene of devotion the proximity to the interminable series of epitaphs in this novel!

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In an appraisal of his most recent work "Ungläubiges Staunen. Über das Christentum" ("Incredulous Wonder. On Christianity") - an appraisal that ranged from thought-provoking to critical - it was noted that Kermani's imagination is set on fire most of all by the sensuous rendering of religious events in Western painting, rather than in the beliefs themselves. Anything that was achieved in recent theology in terms of the exegesis of writings or the turn towards the written word that took place in Protestantism and others - all of this remains outside his sphere of interest, as does modern church art. Incarnation as a principle: this is how we can characterize

Kermani's relationship to Christianity evoked by the title. From "Dein Name," we know how much he was fascinated by the Baroque pictorial world during his stay in Rome in 2008; we know how he stood in amazement in the churches, avowing the creations of the grand Bolognese veritable revelations. In *San Luigi dei Francesi*, it is likely that he experienced Caravaggio's "The Calling of St. Matthew" as a personal challenge: "It could be any one them, any of the four men sitting around the table, and the boy, too. It could be taking place now, as Caravaggio shows us by [...] dressing the biblical figures in the garments of his own, Caravaggio's, era." For Kermani the spectator, Jesus' outstretched index finger is referring *to that one* among the men sitting at the table, the one who takes cover in the act of counting money, the one who appears to have not yet noticed the outstretched beam of light. Indeed, the calling appears to have not yet taken place. The moment as yet is without consequence. The quotidian, though meticulously recorded, still prevails over the extraordinary. "This would have to mean that the miracle is not the appearance of the redeemer; the miracle is that somebody notices it – and, if I am not mistaken, it is about to happen to precisely the person who doesn't even notice the Savior. The men will only be stunned when their colleague gives up his family, his profession and his view of the world from one second to the next."

Indeed, we can only marvel at Caravaggio's masterpieces; we have no choice but to be deeply and directly affected by a reality that has moved into the unknown. Only in Caravaggio's omnipotent imagination, still tied to the misery of the world, was it possible to successfully and repeatedly link the horror and the muck of our everyday lives to metaphysical rapture: Thomas the non-believer sticks his index finger into Jesus' wound, the executioner wipes his bloody sword on the coat of John the Baptist, whom he has just beheaded. It is surprise more than irritation that sparks Navid Kermani's religious imagination. A wonder both incredulous and incredible characterizes each of Kermani's image encounters with Jacob's battle with the angel; simultaneously the utmost heightening and the fundamental restriction of wonder. In the long series of these interpretations, which uses three thematic circles to chart the orbit of salvation in Christianity – and which ranges from the legendary Late Antique image of the Virgin Mary to Gerhard Richter's Cologne Cathedral window – the chapter about Paolo Dall'Oglio takes up a special place. In this case, it is not an image that is being observed; instead, it is a lived encounter of Islam and Christianity, beyond the syncretism dammed by both religions and their beliefs. To this Jesuit priest, the ideal of the Imitation of Christ meant that "he would devote his life to Islam, which he had seen on the horizon forty years prior. I don't know a Muslim who

could communicate the message of the Quran more convincingly and believably than he." In the Mar Musa monastery at the edge of the Syrian desert, Pater Paolo weaves elements bit by bit from Sufi religious practice into everyday religious life – however without diluting Catholic rituals. "Mar Musa thus became a site not only of discussion among the religions, but also one of shared living and praying: or, as Pater Paolo called one of his books, *Out of Love for Islam, With Faith in Jesus*."

The final sentence of Kermani's chapter, written in May 2015, is the following: "He taught us hope in this world, but also hope for another world." It is not possible for skepticism and trust in the world to come any closer to one another than this. It is in light of this proximity that Navid Kermani experiences Christianity: as a distinctly religious thinker, as an engaged contemporary and as an author of a novel that is *to be written*. He experiences Christianity in his images and in literature; but he does so beyond the liturgical calendar. With the new book in hand, in amazement and inspired to dialogue, we wait with an uncomfortable tension for the next chapter in the novel that Navid Kermani is writing. But not just the one he is writing, others too!

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Permit me one addendum: In September 2008, the *reporter* Kermani travelled to the Island of Lampedusa off the coast of Italy and the African continent to report about the refugees packed onto boats by human smugglers. There he met the French captain of a FRONTEX ship whose function was actually to keep refugees *away* from Europe. He was, however, able to save 65 Somalis cast adrift in a storm. When asked how he could possibly reconcile his behavior with the obligations of his job, the captain exclaimed: "When I see a wooden boat with 65 people in it on the open sea, I don't give a shit about FRONTEX. I don't think about immigration, IDs or customs officers. I save them, damn it." And Kermani comments on this dialogue with the following: "I'm sure that the captain would have behaved the same a way even without the approval of his superiors." Human rights are a human obligation.

And today, the jury is bestowing the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade to Navid Kermani at a moment where the intensity of the refugee movement has reached that of a mass migration. I am proud and happy to be the first one to congratulate him on behalf of all of us today.

Translated by the Hagedorn Group.

Navid Kermani

Beyond the Borders – Jacques Mourad and Love in Syria

Acceptance speech

On the day I received the news of the Peace Prize of the German Publishers' Association, the same day, Jacques Mourad was abducted in Syria. Two armed men entered the monastery of Mar Elian on the outskirts of the small town of Qaryatain and demanded to see Father Jacques. They found him no doubt in his bare little office, which also served as his living room and bedroom, seized him and took him with them. On May 21, 2015, Jacques Mourad became a hostage of the so-called Islamic State.

I first met Father Jacques in the autumn of 2012, when I was travelling through an already war-torn Syria to report on the events there. He was responsible for the Catholic parish of Qaryatain and also belonged to the community of Mar Musa, which was founded in the early 1980s in a derelict early Christian monastery. It is a special, probably a unique Christian community, for it is devoted to the encounter with Islam and love for Muslims. While conscientiously following the commandments and rituals of their own Catholic church, the nuns and monks engage equally earnestly with Islam and take part in Muslim traditions, including the observance of Ramadan. It sounds mad, even ludicrous: Christians who, as they themselves put it, have fallen in love with Islam. And yet this Christian-Muslim love was a reality in Syria only recently, and still is in the hearts of many Syrians. With the work of their hands, the kindness of their hearts and the prayers of their souls, the nuns and monks of Mar Musa created a place that seemed to me a utopia, a place which – although they did not ignore the divisions of the present – anticipated nothing less than an eschatological reconciliation, took for granted that reconciliation will come. A seventh-century stone monastery, amid the overpowering solitude of the Syrian desert mountains, which was visited by Christians from all over the world, but where day after day still greater numbers of Arab Muslims – dozens, even hundreds – knocked at the door to meet their Christian brethren, to talk, to sing and to keep silence with them, and also to pray according to their own Islamic ritual in a corner of the church that was kept free of images.

When I visited Father Jacques in 2012, the founder of the community, the Italian Jesuit Paolo Dall'Oglio, had just been expelled from the country. Father Paolo had been too outspoken in his criticism of the Assad government, which responded to the Syrian people's demands for freedom and democra-

cy – demands they had raised peacefully for nine months – with arrests and torture, with truncheons and assault rifles, and finally with horrific massacres and even poison gas, until the country descended into civil war. But Father Paolo had also opposed the leadership of the recognized Syrian churches, which had remained silent about the government's violence. He had tried in vain to raise support in Europe for the Syrian democratic movement, and called in vain on the United Nations to impose a no-fly zone or at least to send observers. He had warned in vain of a sectarian war if the jihadists were the only ones to receive support from abroad while the secular and moderate groups were neglected. He had tried in vain to break through the wall of our apathy. In the summer of 2013, the founder of the community of Mar Musa secretly returned to Syria to try to help some Muslim friends who were in the hands of Islamic State, and was himself abducted by Islamic State. Since July 28, 2013, Father Paolo Dall'Oglio has been missing without a trace.

Father Jacques, who now bore sole responsibility for the monastery of Mar Elian, is a very different kind of person: not a gifted orator, not charismatic, not a temperamental Italian, but rather, like so many Syrians I met, a proud, deliberate and extremely polite man, quite tall, with a broad face, his short hair still black. I did not get to know him well, of course; I attended Mass, which consisted of enchantingly beautiful singing as in all Eastern churches, and observed how warmly he chatted with the faithful and with local dignitaries at the lunch that followed. When he had said good-bye to all the guests, he led me to his tiny room for half an hour, placing a chair for me next to the narrow bed upon which he sat for the interview.

It was not only his words that amazed me – how fearlessly he criticised the government, and how openly he also spoke of the hardening taking place in his own Christian community. What made an even more profound impression on me was his demeanour: I experienced him as a quiet, very conscientious, introverted and ascetic servant of God who, now that God had given him the task of ministering to the beleaguered Christians in Qaryatain and leading the monastic community, was devoting all his strength to carrying out this public duty as well. He spoke quietly and slowly – usually with his eyes closed – as if he were consciously slowing down his pulse and using

the interview as a brief rest between two more strenuous commitments. At the same time he chose his words very carefully and articulated his thoughts in polished sentences, and what he said was so clear, and so politically incisive, that I asked him repeatedly whether it might not be too dangerous to quote him directly. Then he opened his warm, dark eyes and nodded wearily – yes, I could print everything, otherwise he would not have said it; the world had to learn what was happening in Syria.

This weariness – this was also a strong impression, perhaps my strongest, of Father Jacques – it was the weariness of one who not only acknowledged, but indeed affirmed that he might not find rest before the next life; it was also the weariness of a doctor or a fire-fighter who husbands his strength in the face of mounting adversity. And Father Jacques was indeed a doctor and fire-fighter too in the midst of the war, not only for the souls of those living in fear, but also for the bodies of the needy, whom he gave food, shelter, clothes, protection and, above all, loving attention in his church, regardless of their religion. To the end, the community of Mar Musa sheltered and cared for many hundreds if not thousands of refugees, the vast majority of them Muslims, at the monastery. And not only that: Father Jacques managed to keep peace, even between the different faiths, at least in Qaryatain. It is chiefly thanks to him, the quiet, serious Father Jacques, that the various groups and militias, some of them aligned with the government and some opposed to it, agreed to keep all heavy weapons out of the town. And he, the priest critical of his church, was able to persuade almost all the Christians in his parish to stay. ‘We Christians are a part of this country, whether the fundamentalists here and in Europe like it or not,’ Father Jacques told me. ‘Arab culture is our culture!’

The demands of some Western politicians to admit Arab Christians in particular made a bitter impression on him. The same West that cared not one iota about the millions of Syrians of all confessions who had demonstrated peacefully for democracy and human rights, the same West that had devastated Iraq and supplied Assad with his poison gas, the same West that was allied with Saudi Arabia, the main sponsor of jihadism – this same West was now concerned about the Arab Christians? He could only laugh at the idea, Father Jacques said, with a perfectly straight face. And with his eyes closed he continued, ‘With their irresponsible statements, these politicians promote the very confessionalism that threatens us Christians.’

The responsibility grew constantly, and Father Jacques bore it as patiently as ever. The community’s non-Syrian members had to leave the country and took refuge in northern Iraq. Only the seven Syrian

monks and nuns stayed behind, dividing themselves between the monasteries of Mar Musa and Mar Elia. The front was constantly shifting, and Qaryatain was ruled sometimes by the state and sometimes by opposition militias. The monks and nuns had to come to terms with both sides and, like all the inhabitants, to survive the air raids whenever the little town was in opposition hands. But then Islamic State advanced ever deeper into the Syrian heartland. ‘The threat from IS, this sect of terrorists who present such a ghastly picture of Islam, has arrived in our region,’ Father Jacques wrote to a French friend a few days before his abduction. The message to her continues, ‘It is difficult to decide what we should do. Should we leave our homes? We are loath to do that. It is dreadful to admit that we have been abandoned – especially by the Christian world, which has decided to keep its distance so as not to endanger itself. We mean nothing to them.’

Two phrases are striking in these few lines of a simple e-mail, no doubt written in haste, phrases which are both characteristic of Father Jacques and a standard for all intellectual integrity. In the first phrase, Father Jacques writes, ‘The threat from IS, this sect of terrorists who present such a ghastly picture of Islam’. The second phrase, referring to the Christian world: ‘We mean nothing to them.’ Father Jacques defended the community he does not belong to, and criticised his own. A few days before his abduction, when the group that pretends to represent Islam and claims to apply the law of the Quran was already an immediate physical danger to him and his parish, Father Jacques still insisted that these terrorists were distorting the true face of Islam. I would take issue with any Muslim whose only response to the phenomenon of the Islamic State was the worn-out phrase that their violence has nothing to do with Islam. But a Christian, a Christian priest who could expect to be expelled, humiliated, abducted or killed by followers of another faith, yet still insisted on defending that faith – such a man of God displays a magnanimity that I have encountered nowhere else, except in the lives of the saints.

A person like myself cannot and must not defend Islam in that way. The love of one’s own – one’s own culture, one’s own country and also one’s own person – manifests itself in self-criticism. The love of the other – of another person, another culture and even another religion – can be far more effusive; it can be unreserved. It is true that the prerequisite for love of the other is love of oneself. But one can only fall in love, as Father Paolo and Father Jacques did with Islam, with the other. Self-love must be a struggling, doubting, constantly questioning love if it is to avoid falling prey to narcissism, self-praise, self-satisfaction. How true that is of Islam today! Any

Muslim who does not struggle with it, does not doubt it and does not critically question it does not love Islam.

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I am thinking not only of the horrific news and the still more horrific pictures from Syria and Iraq, where the Quran is held aloft at every act of barbarism and 'Allahu akbar' is cried out at every beheading. In so many other countries too, indeed in most countries in the Muslim world, state authorities, state-associated institutions, theological schools and rebel groups all appeal to Islam as they oppress their own people, discriminate against women, and persecute, expel or massacre those with different ideas, religious beliefs or ways of life. Islam is invoked to justify stoning women in Afghanistan, murdering whole classes of schoolchildren in Pakistan, enslaving hundreds of girls in Nigeria, beheading Christians in Libya, shooting bloggers in Bangladesh, detonating bombs on marketplaces in Somalia, murdering Sufis and musicians in Mali, crucifying dissidents in Saudi Arabia, banning the most important works of contemporary literature in Iran, oppressing Shiites in Bahrain, and inciting violence between Sunnis and Shiites in Yemen.

The vast majority of Muslims certainly reject terror, violence and oppression. This is something I have experienced directly on my travels; it is not an empty slogan. On the contrary: those who cannot take freedom for granted know its value best. All of the mass uprisings of recent years in the Islamic world have been uprisings for democracy and human rights: not only the attempted, although mostly failed revolutions in almost all the Arab countries, but also the protest movements in Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and, not least, the revolt at the ballot box in the last Indonesian presidential election. The streams of refugees likewise indicate where many Muslims hope to find better lives than in their home countries: certainly not in religious dictatorships. And the reports that reach us directly from Mosul and Raqqa attest, not to enthusiasm, but to the panic and despair of the population. Every relevant theological authority in the Islamic world has rejected the claim of IS to speak for Islam, and explained in detail how its practices and ideology go against the Quran and the basic teachings of Islamic theology. And let us not forget that those who are fighting on the front lines against Islamic State are themselves Muslims - Kurds, Shiites and also Sunni tribes and the members of the Iraqi army.

All of this needs to be said to expose the illusion that is being propounded in unison by the Islamists and the critics of Islam alike, namely that Islam is waging a war against the West. More accurately, Islam is waging a war against itself; that is to say, the

Islamic world is being shaken by an inner conflict whose effects on the political and ethnic map may well come close to matching the dislocations that resulted from the First World War. The multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural Orient, which I studied through its superb literary achievements of the Middle Ages, and which I came to love as an endangered, never whole yet still vital reality during long stays in Cairo and Beirut, as a child during summer holidays in Isfahan and as a reporter at the monastery of Mar Musa - this Orient will have ceased to exist, like the world of yesteryear which Stefan Zweig recalled with nostalgia and sorrow in the 1920s.

What happened? Islamic State was not founded yesterday, nor did it begin with the civil wars in Iraq and Syria. Though its methods meet with abhorrence, its ideology is none other than Wahhabism, which exerts its influence in the remotest corners of the Islamic world today and, in the form of Salafism, has become attractive especially to young people in Europe. Since we know that the schoolbooks and curricula of Islamic State are 95 per cent identical with the schoolbooks and curricula in Saudi Arabia, we also know it is not just in Iraq and Syria that the world is strictly divided into what is forbidden and what is permitted - and humanity divided into believers and unbelievers. A school of thought that declares all people of other religions heretics, and berates, terrorises, vilifies and insults them, has been promulgated for decades, sponsored with billions from oil production, in mosques, in books and on television. If you denigrate other people systematically, day after day, it is only logical - how well we know this from our own history, from German history - that you will end up declaring their lives worthless. That such a religious fascism has become conceivable at all, that IS is able to recruit so many fighters, and still more sympathisers, that it has been able to overrun entire countries and capture major cities with hardly a fight - this is not the beginning, but rather the endpoint to date of a long decline, and I am referring not least to the decline of religious thought.

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I took up Middle Eastern studies in 1988; my topics were the Quran and poetry. I think everyone who studies this subject in its classical form reaches a point where they can no longer reconcile the past with the present. And they become hopelessly, hopelessly sentimental. Naturally the past was not simply peaceful and colourfully diverse. As a philologist, however, I was dealing mostly with the writings of the mystics, philosophers, rhetoricians and theologians. And I, or rather we students, can only marvel, then and now, at the originality, the intellectual scope, the aesthetic power and the great humanity we find in the spirituality of Ibn Arabi, the poetry of

Rumi, the historiography of Ibn Khaldun, the poetic theology of Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, the philosophy of Averroes, the travel reports of Ibn Battuta; and in the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*, which are worldly – yes, worldly and erotic, and feminist too, incidentally, and at the same time infused with the spirit and the verses of the Quran on every page. These were not newspapers, of course; the social reality of that civilisation was, like any other, greyer and more violent. And yet these documents of their age tell us something about what was once conceivable, even taken for granted, within Islam. None of this can be found in the religious culture of modern Islam, nothing whatsoever that is even remotely comparable, that is as fascinating, as profound as the writings I came across as a student. To say nothing of Islamic architecture, Islamic art or Islamic musicology: they no longer exist.

Let me illustrate the loss of creativity and freedom in the context of my own field: there was a time when it was conceivable, and even taken for granted, that the Quran is a poetic text which can only be grasped using the tools and methods of literary studies, no differently than a poem. It was conceivable and taken for granted that a theologian was at the same time a literary scholar and an expert on poetry, and in many cases a poet himself. In our time, my own teacher Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd in Cairo was charged with heresy, driven from his university and even pronounced divorced from his wife because he conceived Quranic studies as a form of literary scholarship. In other words, an approach to the Quran which was once taken for granted, and for which Nasr Abu Zayd was able to cite the most important scholars of classical Islamic theology, is no longer even acknowledged as thinkable. Anyone taking such an approach to the Quran, even though it is the traditional one, is persecuted, punished and declared a heretic. And yet the Quran is a text that not only rhymes, but speaks in disturbing, ambiguous and enigmatic images; nor is it a book at all so much as a recitation, the score of a chant that moves its Arab listeners with its rhythm, onomatopoeia and melody. Islamic theology not only examined the aesthetic peculiarities of the Quran; it declared the beauty of its language to be the authenticating miracle of Islam. All over the Islamic world today, however, we can observe what happens when one ignores the linguistic structure of a text, when one no longer adequately understands or even acknowledges it: the Quran is degraded to a reference manual in which people look up arbitrary keywords using a search engine. The powerful eloquence of the Quran becomes political dynamite.

We read so often that Islam must be cleansed by the fire of Enlightenment, or that modernity must win

out over tradition. But that is perhaps too simplistic when we consider that Islam's past was so much more enlightened, and its traditional writings at times more modern, than the current theological discourse. Goethe and Proust, Lessing and Joyce were not out of their minds, after all, to have been fascinated by Islamic culture. They saw something in the books and monuments that we no longer perceive so easily, brutally confronted as we often are by contemporary Islam. Perhaps the problem of Islam is less its tradition than its nearly total break with that tradition, the loss of its cultural memory, its civilisational amnesia.

All the peoples of the Orient experienced a brutal modernisation imposed from above in the form of colonialism and secular dictatorships. The headscarf – to name one example – the headscarf was not abandoned gradually by Iranian women: in 1936, the Shah sent his soldiers out into the streets to tear it from their heads by force. Unlike Europe, where modernity – in spite of all the setbacks and crimes – was ultimately experienced as a process of emancipation and took place gradually over many decades and centuries, the Middle East experienced it largely as violence. Modernity was associated not with freedom, but with exploitation and despotism. Imagine an Italian president driving his car into St Peter's Basilica, jumping onto the altar with his dirty boots and whipping the Pope in the face: then you will have a rough idea of what it meant when, in 1928, Reza Shah marched through the holy shrine of Qom in his riding boots and responded to the imam's request to take off his shoes like any other believer by striking him in the face with his whip. And you will find comparable events and pivotal moments in many other Middle Eastern countries which, instead of slowly leaving the past behind, demolished that past and tried to erase it from memory.

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One might have thought that the religious fundamentalists who gained influence throughout the Islamic world after the failure of nationalism would have valued at least their own culture. Yet the opposite was the case: by seeking to return to a supposed point of origin, they not only neglected Islamic tradition, but resolutely fought it. We are only surprised by Islamic State's acts of iconoclasm because we never noticed that there are virtually no ancient relics left in Saudi Arabia. In Mecca, the Wahhabis have destroyed the tombs and mosques of the Prophet's closest kin, including the house he was born in. The historic mosque of the Prophet in Medina has been replaced with a colossal new building, and on the site where, until a few years ago, the house of Muhammad and his wife Khadija stood, there is now a public toilet.

Apart from the Quran, my studies were focused mainly on Islamic mysticism, Sufism. Mysticism sounds like something marginal, esoteric; a kind of underground culture. In the Islamic context, nothing could be further from the truth. Well into the 20th century, Sufism formed the basis of popular religion almost everywhere in the Islamic world; in Asian Islam, it still does. At the same time, Islamic high culture – especially poetry, the fine arts and architecture – was infused with the spirit of mysticism. As the most common form of religious life, Sufism was the ethical and aesthetic counterweight to the orthodoxy of the legal scholars. By emphasising God’s compassion above all and seeing it behind every letter of the Quran, by constantly seeking beauty in religion, acknowledging truth in other forms of faith too, and explicitly adopting the Christian commandment to love one’s enemies, Sufism infused Islamic societies with values, stories and sounds that could not have resulted from literalist pietism alone. As the Islam of daily life, Sufism did not invalidate the Islam of law, but complemented it and made its day-to-day form softer, more ambivalent, more permeable, more tolerant; and most of all, through music, dance and poetry, it opened Islam to sensual experience.

Hardly any of this has survived. Wherever the Islamists have gained a foothold, from the 19th century in what is now Saudi Arabia to recent events in Mali, they began by putting an end to Sufi festivals, banning the mystics’ writings, destroying the tombs of the saints and cutting the long hair of the Sufi leaders or killing them outright. But not only the Islamists. The reformers and the Enlightened religious philosophers of the 19th and early 20th centuries also found the traditions and customs of popular Islam backward and antiquated. It was not they who took Sufi literature seriously, but the Western scholars, Orientalists like the Peace Prize winner of 1995, Annemarie Schimmel, who published scholarly editions of the manuscripts and so saved them from destruction. And even today, only a handful of Muslim intellectuals address the treasures found in their own tradition. The destroyed, neglected, rubbish-filled old city quarters all over the Islamic world, with their ruined architectural monuments, symbolize the decline of Islamic thought every bit as vividly as the biggest shopping mall in the world, which has been built in Mecca right beside the Kaaba. You have to picture this; you can see it in photos: the holiest place in Islam, this simple and superb edifice where the Prophet himself prayed, is literally towered over by Gucci and Apple. Perhaps we should have listened less to the Islam of our grand thinkers and more to the Islam of our grandmothers.

To be sure, people have started restoring buildings and mosques in some countries; but only after

Western art historians or Westernised Muslims like myself came along and recognised the value of the tradition. And, unfortunately, we came a century too late, when the buildings had already crumbled, the building techniques had been forgotten and the books erased from memory. But we believed there was still time to study the remains thoroughly. Now as a reader I almost feel like an archaeologist in a war zone, gathering up relics hastily and often haphazardly so that future generations will at least be able to view them in museums. Certainly Muslim countries are still producing outstanding works, as we can see at biennials and film festivals, and once more at this year’s Book Fair. But this culture has hardly anything to do with Islam. There is no Islamic culture any more; at least, none of quality. What we now have bursting all around us and raining down on our heads is the debris of a massive intellectual implosion.

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Is there any hope? Until our last breath there is hope – that is what Father Paolo, the founder of the community of Mar Musa, teaches us. Hope is the central theme of his writings. The day after his disciple and deputy was abducted, the Muslims of Qaryatain flooded into the church, unasked, and prayed for their Father Jacques. That must surely give us hope that love works across the boundaries between religions, ethnicities and cultures. The news and the pictures of Islamic State have produced a powerful shock, and it has set opposing forces in motion. Finally, a resistance to violence in the name of religion is taking shape in the Islamic orthodoxy as well. And for some years now – perhaps less in the Arabian heartland of Islam than on the periphery, in Asia, South Africa, Iran, Turkey and not least among Muslims in the West – we have witnessed the development of a new religious thought. Europe too had to reinvent itself after the two World Wars. And perhaps I should mention, considering the flippancy, disdain and open contempt which our politicians – no, which we as a society have shown towards the European project of unification, the most politically valuable project ever initiated by this continent, perhaps I should mention at this juncture how often people bring up the subject of Europe with me on my travels: as a model, almost a utopia. Anyone who has forgotten why there needs to be a Europe should look at the emaciated, exhausted, frightened faces of the refugees who have left everything behind, given up everything, risked their lives for the promise that Europe still represents.

That brings me back to the second phrase of Father Jacques’s that I found remarkable, his statement about the Christian world: ‘We mean nothing to them.’ As a Muslim, it is not my place to cast blame on the Christians of the world for failing to aid, if not

the Syrian and Iraqi peoples, then at least their own brothers and sisters in faith. And yet I too cannot help thinking it when I experience the lack of interest of our public sphere in the seemingly apocalyptic disaster in the East, which we try to repel with barbed-wire fences, warships, stereotypes and mental blinkers. Just a three-hour flight away from Frankfurt, whole ethnic groups are being exterminated or expelled, girls are being enslaved, many of humanity's most important cultural monuments are being blown up, cultures are disappearing and with them an ancient ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity that, in contrast to Europe, had still persisted to a certain extent into the 21st century - but we only join together and rise up when one of the bombs of this war strikes us, as it did on January 7 and 8 in Paris, or when the people fleeing this war come knocking at our gates.

It is a good thing that our societies, responding better than they did to September 11, 2001, have opposed terror with freedom. It is uplifting to see so many people in Europe, and especially in Germany, supporting refugees. But this protest and this solidarity too often fall short of becoming political. We are not having a broad dialogue in our society about the causes of terror and refugee movements, about how our own policies may in fact be exacerbating the disaster taking place just outside our borders. We are not asking why our closest partner in the Middle East is Saudi Arabia, of all countries. We are not learning from our mistakes when we roll out the red carpet for a dictator like General el-Sisi. Or we are learning the wrong lessons, if we conclude from the disastrous wars in Iraq or Libya that it is best not to get involved even when genocide begins. We have not come up with any way to prevent the murders being committed by the Syrian regime against its own people for the past four years. We have likewise resigned ourselves to the existence of a new religious fascism whose territory is roughly the size of Great Britain and extends from the Iranian border almost to the Mediterranean. Not that there are any simple answers to such questions as how a metropolis like Mosul can be liberated - but we are not even asking the question in earnest. An organisation like Islamic State, with an estimated 30,000 fighters, is not invincible to the world community - we cannot allow it to be. 'Today they are in our country,' said the Catholic archbishop of Mosul, Youhanna Boutros Moshe, when he asked the West and the great powers to help drive IS out of Iraq. 'Today they are in our country. Tomorrow they will be in yours.'

I am hesitate to imagine what else has to happen before we agree with the Archbishop of Mosul, for the logic of Islamic State's propaganda is to kindle ever higher degrees of horror with its images in order to

penetrate our consciousness. Once we ceased to be outraged at the sight of individual Christian hostages saying the rosary before being beheaded, IS started beheading whole groups of Christians. When we banished the decapitations from our screens, IS burnt the pictures in the National Museum in Mosul. Once we had become inured to the sight of smashed statues, IS began levelling the ancient ruins of whole cities like Nimrod and Nineveh. When we stopped worrying about the expulsions of Yazidis, the news of mass rapes briefly jolted us from our slumber. When we thought the terrors were confined to Iraq and Syria, snuff videos reached us from Libya and Egypt. When we had grown accustomed to the beheadings and the crucifixions, they beheaded their victims first and then crucified them, as they recently did in Libya. Palmyra is not being blown up all at once, but in fact one building at a time, at intervals of several weeks, in order to produce a fresh news item each time. This will not stop. IS will go on escalating the horror until we see, hear and feel in our European day-to-day lives that this horror will not end by itself. Paris will have been only the beginning, and Lyon will not be the last beheading. And the longer we wait, the fewer options we will have. In other words, it is already far too late.

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Can the recipient of a peace prize call for war? I am not calling for war. I am merely pointing out that there is a war - and that we too, as its closest neighbours, must respond to it, possibly by military means, yes, but above all with far more determination than we have shown up to now, in our diplomacy and in civil society. For this war can no longer be ended in Syria and Iraq alone. It can only be ended by the powers behind the warring armies and militias: Iran, Turkey, the Gulf states, Russia and the West. And only when our societies cease to accept the madness will our governments take action. Whatever we do at this point, we will probably make mistakes. But our greatest mistake would be to go on doing nothing, or too little, against the mass murder being carried out by Islamic State and the Assad regime at Europe's doorstep.

'I have just returned from Aleppo,' Father Jacques continued in the e-mail he wrote a few days before his abduction on May 21: *this city which sleeps by the river of pride, which lies at the centre of the Orient. It is now like a woman consumed by cancer. Everyone is fleeing Aleppo, especially the poor Christians. Yet these massacres strike not only the Christians, they strike the entire Syrian people. Our purpose is difficult to achieve, especially in these days since the disappearance of Father Paolo, the teacher and initiator of dialogue in the 21st century. In these days we are living that dialogue as a com-*

munal, shared suffering. We are sad in this unjust world which bears a share of the responsibility for the victims of the war, this world of the dollar and the euro, which cares only for its own peoples, its own prosperity, its own safety, while the rest of the world dies of hunger, disease and war. It seems their only aim is to find regions where they can wage wars and further increase their trade in arms and aeroplanes. How do these governments justify themselves, when they could end the massacres, but do nothing, nothing at all?

I do not fear for my faith, but I fear for the world. The question we ask ourselves is this: do we have a right to live or not? The answer has already been given, for this war is a clear answer, as clear as sunlight. So the real dialogue we are living today is the dialogue of mercy.

Courage, my dear, I am with you and embrace you.

Jacques.

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Two months after the abduction of Father Jacques, on July 28, 2015, Islamic State took over the small town of Qaryatain. Most of the inhabitants managed to flee at the last moment, but two hundred Christians were kidnapped by IS. Another month later, on August 21, the monastery of Mar Elian was destroyed by bulldozers. You can see in the pictures posted online by IS that not one of the 1,700-year-old stones was left standing. Another two weeks later, on September 3, photos appeared on an Islamic State website showing some of the Christian hostages from Qaryatain sitting in the front rows of a school auditorium or municipal hall, their heads shaven, some of them little more than skin and bone, their faces void of expression, all of them marked by their captivity. Father Jacques is recognisable in the photos, wearing plain clothes, likewise emaciated and with his head shorn, the shock clearly visible in his eyes. He is covering his mouth with his hand, as if unwilling to believe what he is seeing. On the stage of the hall we see a broad-shouldered, long-bearded man in combat fatigues signing a contract. It is what is known as a dhimmi contract, which subjugates Christians to Muslim rule. They are forbidden to build churches or monasteries, and to carry crosses or Bibles on their person. Their priests are not allowed to wear clerical attire. Muslims must not hear the prayers of Christians, read their writings or enter their churches. The Christians are not allowed to bear arms and must obey the instructions of Islamic State unconditionally. They must bow their heads, endure all injustices in silence, and also pay a poll tax, the *jizya*, to be allowed to live. The contract is sickening to read: it divides God's creatures quite clearly into first and

second-class persons, and leaves no doubt that there are also third-class persons whose lives are worth even less.

It is a calm but utterly depressed and helpless glance that Father Jacques casts at us in the photo as he covers his mouth with his hand. He had expected his own martyrdom. But to see his parish taken captive - the children he christened, the lovers he married, the elderly to whom he promised the last rites - must be enough to drive him mad, to drive even a man as deliberate, inwardly strong and devoted to God as Father Jacques mad. After all, it was for his sake that the other captives had stayed in Qaryatain instead of fleeing Syria like so many other Christians. Father Jacques no doubt believes that he bears guilt; but God, I know this much, God will judge him otherwise.

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Is there hope? Yes, there is hope, there is always hope. I had already written this speech when, five days ago, on Tuesday, I received the news that Father Jacques Mourad is free. Inhabitants of the town of Qaryatain helped him escape from his cell. They disguised him and managed to get him out of the IS-controlled area with the help of Bedouins. He has now returned to his brothers and sisters of the Mar Musa community. Apparently a number of people were involved in the rescue, all of them Muslims, every one of them risking his or her life for a Christian priest. Love worked across the boundaries between religions, ethnicities and cultures. And yet, as magnificent as this news is - indeed, as wondrous as it is in the literal sense of the word - sorrow nevertheless outweighs the joy, and most bitterly Father Jacques's own sorrow. Indeed, the lives of the two hundred other Christians in Qaryatain may well be in greater danger now than before his escape. And there is still no trace of his teacher, Father Paolo, the founder of the Christian community that loves Islam. Until our last breath there is hope.

The recipient of a peace prize should not call for war. But he can call to prayer. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to make an unusual request - although, in a church, it is not really so unusual after all. I would like to ask you to refrain from applauding at the end of my speech and instead to pray for Father Paolo and the two hundred captive Christians of Qaryatain, for the children Father Jacques baptized, for the lovers he married, for the elderly whom he promised the last rites. And if you are not religious, then let your wishes be with those who have been abducted, and with Father Jacques, who struggles with the fact that only he has been freed. What are prayers after all but wishes addressed to God? I believe in wishes, and I believe that they have power in

our world, with or without God. Without wishes, mankind would never have built one stone upon one another, the stones it so recklessly demolishes in war. And so I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, to pray for Jacques Mourad, pray for Paolo Dall'Oglio, pray for the Christians of Qaryatain, pray or wish for the liberation of all hostages and the freedom of Syria and Iraq. I invite you to stand up so that we can answer

the snuff videos of the terrorists with a picture of our brotherhood.

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Thank you.

Translated by Wieland Hoban.

Peace Prize winners and their laudatory speakers

1950	Max Tau - Adolf Grimme	1985	Teddy Kollek - Manfred Rommel
1951	Albert Schweitzer - Theodor Heuss	1986	Władysław Bartoszewski - Hans Maier
1952	Romano Guardini - Ernst Reuter	1987	Hans Jonas - Robert Spaemann
1953	Martin Buber - Albrecht Goes	1988	Siegfried Lenz - Yohanan Meroz
1954	Carl J. Burckhardt - Theodor Heuss	1989	Václav Havel - André Glucksmann
1955	Hermann Hesse - Richard Benz	1990	Karl Dedecius - Heinrich Olschowsky
1956	Reinhold Schneider - Werner Bergengruen	1991	György Konrád - Jorge Semprún
1957	Thornton Wilder - Carl J. Burckhardt	1992	Amos Oz - Siegfried Lenz
1958	Karl Jaspers - Hannah Arendt	1993	Friedrich Schorlemmer - Richard von Weizsäcker
1959	Theodor Heuss - Benno Reifenberg	1994	Jorge Semprún - Wolf Lepenies
1960	Victor Gollancz - Heinrich Lübke	1995	Annemarie Schimmel - Roman Herzog
1961	Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan - Ernst Benz	1996	Mario Vargas Llosa - Jorge Semprún
1962	Paul Tillich - Otto Dibelius	1997	Yaşar Kemal - Günter Grass
1963	Carl F. von Weizsäcker - Georg Picht	1998	Martin Walser - Frank Schirrmacher
1964	Gabriel Marcel - Carlo Schmid	1999	Fritz Stern - Bronislaw Geremek
1965	Nelly Sachs - Werner Weber	2000	Assia Djebar - Barbara Frischmuth
1966	Kardinal Bea/Visser 't Hooft - Paul Mikat	2001	Jürgen Habermas - Jan Philipp Reemtsma
1967	Ernst Bloch - Werner Maihofer	2002	Chinua Achebe - Theodor Berchem
1968	Léopold Sédar Senghor - François Bondy	2003	Susan Sontag - Ivan Nagel
1969	Alexander Mitscherlich - Heinz Kohut	2004	Péter Esterházy - Michael Naumann
1970	Alva und Gunnar Myrdal - Karl Kaiser	2005	Orhan Pamuk - Joachim Sartorius
1971	Marion Gräfin Dönhoff - Alfred Grosser	2006	Wolf Lepenies - Andrei Pleşu
1972	Janusz Korczak - Hartmut von Hentig	2007	Saul Friedländer - Wolfgang Frühwald
1973	The Club of Rome - Nello Celio	2008	Anselm Kiefer - Werner Spies
1974	Frère Roger - (keine Laudatio)	2009	Claudio Magris - Karl Schlögel
1975	Alfred Grosser - Paul Frank	2010	David Grossman - Joachim Gauck
1976	Max Frisch - Hartmut von Hentig	2011	Boualem Sansal - Peter von Matt
1977	Leszek Kołakowski - Gesine Schwan	2012	Liao Yiwu - Felicitas von Lovenberg
1978	Astrid Lindgren - H.-C. Kirsch, G. U. Becker	2013	Swetlana Alexijewitsch - Karl Schlögel
1979	Yehudi Menuhin - Pierre Bertaux	2014	Jaron Lanier - Martin Schulz
1980	Ernesto Cardenal - Johann Baptist Metz	2015	Navid Kermani - Norbert Miller
1981	Lew Kopelew - Marion Gräfin Dönhoff		
1982	George Kennan - Carl F. von Weizsäcker		
1883	Manès Sperber - Siegfried Lenz		
1984	Octavio Paz - Richard von Weizsäcker		

Die Reden, die am 18.10.2015 aus Anlass der Verleihung des Friedenspreises des Deutschen Buchhandels an Navid Kermani in der Frankfurter Paulskirche gehalten werden, sind urheberrechtlich geschützt. Das zweisprachige (deutsch/englisch) Buch mit den Reden von der Friedenspreisverleihung und weiteren Informationen zum Friedenspreisträger erscheint Anfang November 2015 und kostet 14,90 €. Es ist im Buchhandel erhältlich oder unter serviceline@mvb-online.de, 069/1306-550.

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