

# Bonner Querschnitte

*Bonn Profiles – Press Reports*

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## **BQ 251 – No. 15/2013**

### **The German television network ZDF will commemorate Good Friday by showing a documentary on the persecution of Christians in the Middle East.**

(Bonn, 28 March, 2013) On Good Friday, 2013, ZDF will use the peak viewing time of 7.30 pm, 29 March, to present a 45-minute documentary on the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, emphasizing the situation in Syria and Egypt. (The program will also air at 4.30 the following morning.) The author and director of the documentary is Andreas Oster, who has traveled throughout the Middle East with film crews.

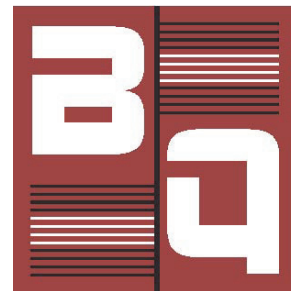
The documentary begins with a question which is suitable for Good Friday. Is it possible that by means of the crucifixion of Jesus, persecution was prescribed for Christianity? The history of the persecution in the Middle East is traced to set the stage for discussions with

refugees, church leaders, and experts. These experts included Prof. Heiner Bielefeldt, United Nations Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion and Belief; Prof. Thomas Söding, New Testament scholar; and Thomas Schirmmacher, sociologist of religion. Schirmmacher, who accompanied the film crew to some locations, was deeply impressed by both the highly differentiated specialized

knowledge and also the sympathy for traumatized refugees shown by the filmmakers: "This will be a truly solid documentary, suitable for Good Friday, which sets a high standard for television productions." Schirmmacher consults with the Central Council of Oriental Christians in Germany, which helped to arrange many of the interviews for the documentary.



During shots in Lebanon



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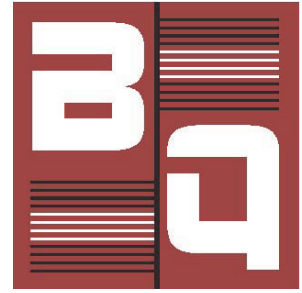
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The following text is translated from the website of ZDF: <http://www.zdf.de/ZDF/zdfportal/programdata/3c6207e5-5373-4524-870d-7e7c80b6e84f/20138828>

### Dangerous Faith—2000 Years of Christian Persecution

In year 30 of our era, at the place of judgment in Jerusalem, a man was tortured and nailed to a cross. This was the most torturous manner of execution for a condemned man. The official accusation mentioned instigation of the people and resistance to the authority of the state.

His followers saw in him a prophet, indeed the Messiah and Redeemer who had long been awaited by the Jews. They were convinced that he would bring peace and salvation into the world. What began with a dozen disciples became, after the death of Jesus of Nazareth, a movement that gripped the entire Mediterranean world. Nothing was able to stop them. The first three centuries are filled with stories of people who willingly went to their deaths because of their faith in Christ.

According to the chronicles of the time, the cruelty practiced by Roman rulers in Christian persecution can hardly be surpassed. Christians were burned alive in the circus, sewn into animal skins, thrown to the lions, or, like Jesus, nailed to a cross.

Today, with 2.2 billion followers, Christianity is the most numerous religion in the world. Almost every third citizen of the earth is a Christian. Until a few years ago, at least in the western world, Christian persecution was regarded as history from ages long past, at best as the background for novels or action movies. But in recent times the situation has changed dramatically. Ever more frequently the news reports burning churches, along with abused and fleeing refugees, in the Near and Middle East; usually the victims are Christians.

Representatives of the Christian Churches, human rights organizations, and also politicians are increasingly using the term “Christian Persecution” and warn about increasing “Fundamentalization” and “Radicalization” especially in Islamic states. The victims report discrimination and abuse, as well as neglect of the help and protection one would normally expect from a government.

This documentary pursues the question, “What is Christian persecution?” Do the roots possibly lie in the readiness of Jesus to die for his convictions, and that he expects that same readiness from his followers? Why do people persecute each other for the sake of faith? Are there parallels to today’s situation in history? How has Christianity itself dealt with violence and with people who think or believe differently in its 2,000-year history? What happens when politics, the state, and religion are tightly connected?

The ZDF film team visited places in the Middle East where old Christian traditions have been anchored for thousands of years and continue as living communities today. They wanted to hear from people who have suffered with their own bodies, as well as from refugees who have fled from their homes because of fear of the current situation.

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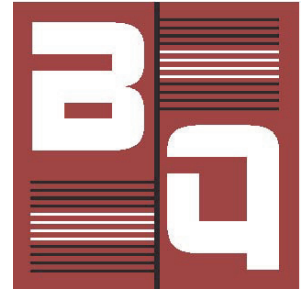
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For an orientation to both historical and contemporary events, the film team was supported by a team of distinguished scholars, including human rights expert Heiner Bielefeldt from Erlangen, who has been the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion and Belief since 2010, sociologist of religion Thomas Schirmmacher from Bonn, and biblical exegete Thomas Söding from Bochum.

### Downloads:

- [Photo](#): During shots in Lebanon

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