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## **„An Image of Islam in German Evangelical Press:**

### **What should the Church say?“**

First of all let me apologize that I am not an expert about intercultural theology and the relations between Christian and Muslim people, but as a professor for Old Testament studies I do know that culture and belief are siblings – the belief of the Israelites changed through their history and their different kinds of relations with the inhabitants around them.<sup>1</sup> Some old testament kings married foreign women to achieve political advantages - David fought for some time for the Philistines; when he declared Jerusalem as the city of David he strengthened his relations to Judea by marriage to Abigail and Abinoam (I Sam 25:39-45). King Solomon strengthened his kingship by marriage to an Egyptian princess and distributive trade with the king of Tyrus (I Ki 9:10-14). At the time of Esra and Nehemia, the rules against marrying any foreign wife became quite strictly enforced, to purify their own identity, even though the Israelite identity had never been without influences from outside. For instance, if we consider Moses, he enjoyed an Egyptian education and life as a prince of Egypt, before becoming leader of the Hebrews.

My following paper will have three approaches to the question of the portrayal of Muslims in German culture and the response of churches:

Firstly I will present a short survey of news and articles of a quite famous evangelical press magazine in Germany, called Idea. Idea is the biggest evangelical magazine and is published weekly. To prepare this paper I did a survey of all articles in 2011 which touch upon the topic of Muslims in Germany and worldwide.

I am going to present this piece of a puzzle connected with the main question:

**What impression does a German Baptist/Christian gain, when he reads about Islamic culture in Idea?**

**Secondly I will present to you some cartoons, which you find in the internet on German websites.**

**Thirdly I will give some suggestions how to manage the image, which is created by evangelical news and cartoons, in a Christ-centered way.**

1. The image of Muslims through the spectacles of „Idea“

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To give to you a clear impression about the news of idea throughtout 2011 until today about Muslims, I will show you a picture of the article and give you a summary about the topic and intention.

26.01.2011, idea Spektrum 4, p. 12

England: Muslims rape schoolgirls. Fear: A Times“ investigation uncovers shocking news: child molestation (abuse) is suppressed because of fear of Islamophobia.

The Home office has ordered an inquiry into allegations of a cover-up of incidents of child molestation, because of the fear of being accused of racism. English girls are deemed to be „easy meat“. Ex-minister of home affairs Straw has called on the Pakistani community to reject these doings. The director of a Muslim youth organisation says it is insulting to claim that sexual abuse is rooted in a religion. The Times reports that since 1997 there have been 56 convictions, 50 of them carrying Muslim names.

09.03.2011 idea Spektrum 10, p. 6

Idea asks: Does Islam belong to Germany? This is a matter of dispute: The new minister of Home affairs, Friedrich, has distanced himself from the President of the German Republic, Wulff. He receives both praise and criticism from the protestant church.

Hans-Peter Friedrich says that Muslims, who live in Germany belong to Germany, but Islam does not, this can not be justified by history. Evangelicals support Friedrich, Christianity and Islam can not be put on the same level. The President of the German Protestant church rejects the saying of Friedrich, stating that because of the faith of Muslims Islam belongs to Germany as well.

A picture of the turret of a mosque shows a flag of Germany and Turkey. The subtitle says: That a lot of Muslims have difficulties understanding themselves as Germans is shown for example in that in front of one of the biggest mosques of Germany there ist a Turkish flag next to a German one.

13.04.2011, idea Spektrum 15, p. 11

Iran burns hundreds of Bibles – and the world keeps silent.

This article criticises that double standards are applied in official public statements – governments give a declaration because of the burning of one Koran in Florida (USA), but do not speak out in the light of the burning of hundreds of Bibles in Iran.

13.04.2011, idea Spektrum 15, p. 09

President of the Germany Lutheran Protestant Church: Islam is aiming for peace too

The President of the German Lutheran churches, Nikolas Schneider, says that it would be a misapprehension to assume that Islam and other big world religions are not interested in peace. It is necessary to distinguish between the world-religion Islam, fundamentalist Islamism and Islamist terrorism.

20.04.2011, idea Spektrum 20, p. 50

Two letters to the editor criticise the words of Nikolas Schneider, saying that he is promulgating an Islamic peace construct instead of preaching the word of God. Islamic terrorists in particular refer to

the Koran, therefore Schneider is interpreting the Koran in a too friendly manner. Another person says, Schneider makes the church a collaborator with an Islamic-fascist ideology.

04.05.2011, idea Spektrum 18, p. 6

After Osama Bin Laden was killed on 1st of May 2011 by a unit of the army of the USA Idea asks: Is the world more secure now? A strike against terrorism. Expert for religious freedom: good news for Christians and moderate Muslims.

Idea quotes an expert for religious affairs that the death of Osama bin Laden is a „comfort for all humans“, even if terrorism is not coming to an end. The killing of Osama is judged to be a marginal case in ethical terms, but it is legitimate to kill such a dangerous person. Speakers of the protestant and catholic national churches are quoted saying that the death of a person can never be a reason for rejoicing, even if Bin Laden was a criminal.

11.05.2011, idea Spektrum 19, p. 37

May antisemitism be discussed by Islam? Association of mosques criticizes the program of a cultural institution

The cultural institution „old synagogue“ of the city of Essen announces a lecture about „antisemitism today“ and mentions that anti-Semitic prejudices influenced the Koran and are being used today.

25.05.2011, idea Spektrum 21, p. 11

Is the Islamic world facing ruin?

A scholar from Egypt says: Islam is without a future, because it does not have answers to today's questions

This article reports the opinion of Hamed Abdel-Samad, who criticises Islam's inability to integrate people in a community, of being schizophrenic because it enjoys products from the west, but declares the west to be immoral. Politicians refer to the Koran to argue for peace, and terrorists use it to justify violence. The Egyptian criticises the German politics of integration, e.g. promotion of the building of mosques, because this does not stimulate integration.

16.06.2011, idea Spektrum 24, p. 12

Pakistan: Muslims want to ban Bibles. The supreme court should declare scripture verses as blasphemous

Islamic scholars ask their government to ban the Bible, because prophets like David and Salomo are described by the Bible with mistakes and weaknesses. The call to ban the Bible is a response to the burning of a Koran by Terry Jones in USA.

16.06.2011, idea Spektrum 24, p. 22-23

Christians in Iraq caught between sitting tight or emigrating – persecution: Fearing terrorism hundreds of thousands of Christians have fled from Iraq to Syria or Jordan. The leader of a Christian relief organisation reports his impression of Mosul in Iraq (where lives are in danger) and Kurdistan.

22.06.2011, idea Spektrum 25, p. 12

Christians and Muslims do not worship the same God

Islam-expert: distinctions are insurmountable

An expert on Islam says, Jesus Christ is humble, but Mohammed is addicted to power, Christians worship God as a gracious father, whereas Muslims experience Allah as a demon.

29.06.2011, idea Spektrum 26, p. 11

Islamic Network plans terrorist attacks against churches

The network of Al-Kaida threatens the western society by announcing attacks against synagogues and churches. With a video message the speaker of Al-Kaida, Adam Gadahn, is encouraging Muslims to continue the Holy war against Zionists and crusaders. The director of the Christian emergency network Mary Marr (Anthem/USA) calls on the Christian churches to prepare safety measures.

13.07.2011, idea Spektrum 28/29, p. 5

Idea presents the „picture of the week“ – a full-page photo with a short explanation. At first sight there are Muslims prostrated in prayer, but the caption says: Extremism. So extreme is the hatred against Christians: Hundreds of radical-salafistic Muslims in Egypt pray against Christians. They bow down to Mekka and point their backsides towards an orthodox-coptic church. The cause of this seems to be that the Islamists are demanding the release of a Christian woman, who supposedly converted to Islam and who is being hidden by the Christians.

13.07.2011, idea Spektrum 28/29, p. 11

Young Muslims in Germany against Jews. Antisemitism. Racist taunts are common in schools and youth clubs. The Islam specialist Michael Kiefer has written for a Jewish magazine that name calling and other abuses against Jews are common in schools and youth clubs and that Israelis are presented as parasitic criminals.

The Evangelical Alliance calls on Christians to pray for the Muslim world during Ramadan. During the fasting month Christians in Islamic countries suffer increased hostilities. The prayer campaign wants to improve the knowledge about Muslims and the ability of Christians to confess their faith.

04.08.2011, idea Spektrum 30/31, p. 6

During Ramadan: Churches wish for Muslims to dive deeper into their faith. Fasting month: Unusual wishes for people of another religion for Ramadan.

The greetings of five catholic bistums and three regions of the protestant churches say with their greeting for Ramadan, that Christians' and Muslims' belief in the dignity of human life is for both a gift and a duty. One church president wishes an important time for body and spirit. In contrast to this the Evangelical Alliance calls Christians to pray for Muslims during Ramadan.

04.08.2011, idea Spektrum 30/31, p. 13

Islamists let people die of starvation. In the Horn of Africa more than 12 million people are suffering of hunger. Christians want to help, but Islamist fanatics do not permit help.

Especially in Solamia, where 3.7 million people are suffering of hunger Islamist extremists are not permitting the international emergency relief agencies to help. Some cattle herdsman were beheaded, because they did not give their cattle to the militia of Somalia.

10.08.2011, idea Spektrum 32, p. 15

Theology – with pro and contra arguments idea asks: Are Christians allowed to strengthen Muslims in their faith? Because of the greetings from Christians during the fasting month this discussion is continued. The Pro view says that it is usual to greet in a friendly manner as neighbours at the Ramadan feast and to respect to belief of others, without currying favour with anyone. The contra view says that it is to be rejected, that Muslims just need to become better Muslims, because they need to get to know Jesus Christ to go to heaven.

24.08.2011, idea Spektrum 34, p. 3

The Second German Television (ZDF), the Christians and the Muslims. A commentary of the speaker of The Protestant Center for Religious and Ideological Issues criticises a five volume film documentary about „Holy wars“, because this television show does not differentiate enough between Islamic and Christian wars. Most Muslims are peaceful citizens, but jihad is not a phantasy of people who hate Islam, but a real ideology. Christians should not feel morally superior, but there is a necessity of a re-evaluation of the Koran and Sunnite teaching.

24.08.2011, idea Spektrum 34, back page

It was the love of God.

Conversion: Why a former Muslim-brother is a Christian missionary today.

Klaus Rösler portraits the Pakistani Aziz Mirza who says, that Koran does not know of the love of God towards humans, and that he did not seek Jesus, but Jesus found him.

19.10.2011, idea Spektrum 42, p. 11

Great-Britain: Polygamy among Muslims is on the increase. The number of men with several spouses has been increasing for the last 15 years, the Islamic sharia-council reports

British law does not accept polygamy, but the Muslim community practises polygamy more and more. At the same time the divorce rate is increasing, polygamy is one reason for this development.

03.11.2011, idea Spektrum 44, p. 6

Why church-members in Germany become Muslims. Conversions: 50 years ago Germany and Turkey signed the recruitment agreements. In German-Turkish marriages the church-members usually become Muslims.

2010 there are 18.2 millions German-foreign couples. 14% have a Turkish background, usually the Christian partner converts to Islam. Reasons for this development seem to be the illogical trinitarian theology of the Christian faith and the clear guidelines for living for Muslims.

03.11.2011, idea Spektrum 44, p. 12-13

Relief agency: Unimaginable cruelty is perpetrated by Muslims on Christians. Persecution congress is debating persecution by Muslims and communists.

The Taliban in Afghanistan wants to eradicate Christianity. A lot of Muslims seems to be disappointed with Islam, because of the antagonism of this religion and the lies of the Koran. The Palestinian Mosab Hassan Yousef wants to free Muslims from the monster Islam. This ex-Muslim calls the Arab spring an allurements to replace one Islamic regime with the next. The violence of fanatic Muslims against Christians is increasing dramatically in Iraq.

05.01.2012, idea Spektrum 1, p. 11-12

Where Christianity threatens to be finished

Persecution: Christians fled from terror in Iraq, Afghanistan and Egypt

The report says the there are 100 million Christians persecuted in 130 states of the world. Afghanistan is now a country without any church, Egypt is feared to be losing all Christians and Nigeria suffers a wave of violence.

22.02.2012, idea Spektrum 8, p. 25

How do Christians react to Islamic missionaries? – Islamist extremists distribute the Koran in pedestrian areas.

Idea reports that Christian speakers react differently to this campaign, some stress that religious freedom permits the distribution of the Koran, others are warning against the radical ideology of the salafistic Muslims.

22.02.2012, idea Spektrum 8, p. 13

Idea asks: Why does the world remain silent about the murder of a Christian?

In most parts of the Islamic world there is a genocide against Christians going on.

The report focusses on a magazine with the title „the war on Christians“ published by Ayaan Hirsi Al in the Newsweek (New York, USA).

07.03.2012, idea Spektrum 10, p. 6-7

Idea asks: How do we deal with radical Muslims? A survey gives cause for alarm, that young Muslims in Germany are ready for violence against unbelievers.

07.03.2012, idea Spektrum 10, p. 25

Interreligious marriage: If Christians and Muslims marry. The protestant center of ecumenical Christianity publishes a paper which is explosive – conservatives criticise the paper.

12.04.2012, idea Spektrum 15, title

Title-Story: One Koran for each House. How radical Muslims evangelise Germany

12.04.2012, idea Spektrum 15, 12-13

Story: Radical Muslims trying to catch souls. Islam. 25 million Koran copies are earmarked for distribution in Europe

Although the distribution of bibles is forbidden in most Islamic countries, radical Muslims are distributing copies of the Koran with a great campaign. Radical Muslims are promoting their faith in about 100 cities so far, carried out by salafists, who are interpreting the Koran in a fundamentalist manner. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution is keeping salafists in Germany under observation. The leader of the Scripture Union of Germany says that a distributed Koran is not a widely read Koran and that the campaign could be a stimulus for Christians to put more effort in reading and sharing the Bible.

18.04.2012, idea Spektrum 16, p. 5

Picture of the week: Protest against the campaign for the distribution of the Koran

A man is depicted who is showing two posters: The contempt for human dignity is explained if you read the Koran. To Kill occurs 180 times in the Koran, 27 times as an imperative.

18.04.2012, idea Spektrum 16, p. 6-7

Koran-Campaign: Jews and Christians are going to hell. Salafists: Politicians and the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution urge watchfulness against extremist propaganda.

Idea reports that the radical Islamic salafists want to continue their distribution campaign although there is a lot of criticism. Idea quotes the preacher and businessman Ibrahim Abou-Nagie, who says, that people who follow the Bible like Christians and Jews will go to hell, as well as all traitors who claim that Muslims are on the same level as those of other religions. Idea reports that journalists are threatened with violence if they write critically about the campaign. The publisher of the Koran has given back the order of printing more copies. Some moderate Muslims are criticising the campaign, because the Koran forbids evangelism. Some commentators are accepting the campaign because of the value of religious freedom.

18.04.2012, idea Spektrum 16, p. 9

Evangelicals and Islamists put in one boat. Word for Sunday: The German Evangelical Alliance lodges a complaint to Television (NDR). The catholic priest Wolfgang Beck puts the pious-brothers, evangelical groups and salafists into one sentence, because they want to be clear and live out what they believe. They don't accept compromises, even if life is full of them.

18.04.2012, idea Spektrum 16, p. 15f.

Idea asks: Should Christians read the Koran? Mission. For weeks salafists have distributed copies of the Koran. Should Christians read the Koran to be able to argue better with Muslims? Pro and Contra.

25.04.2012, idea Spektrum 17, p. 3

Commentary: The publisher of idea writes a commentary: Is the Koran turning the churches to self-examination?

Helmut Matthies is criticising the churches as embarrassing, that they just point out religious-freedom, and do not take the chance to confess Jesus Christ clearly and distribute New Testaments.

He criticises interreligious papers, which are not showing that Islam and Christianity are not the same, but in opposition. The consequences of Christian belief is: Love your enemies! of Mohammed: Kill them! Matthies seriously asks: Do we want stoning even in Germany and shows that Ibrahim Abou-Nagie is pleading to read the Koran literally.

25.04.2012, idea Spektrum 17, p. 5

Photo of the week: Instead of Koran Bibles.

25.04.2012, idea Spektrum 17, p. 19-21

What is written in the Koran? Because of the distribution-campaign of salafistic Muslims idea asked an expert of Islam summarize the main issues of the Koran. The topics are that the Koran is formally an address to an anonymous person, that it is not ordered chronologically or thematically, and therefore includes some disagreements. Islam means submission and obedience, women generally are below men, the Koran claims that Noah, Mose, David and even Jesus were Muslims. Jews and Christians are cursed by Koran and that Koran admonishes the believers to make war against non-believers.

09.05.2012, idea Spektrum 19, p. 6-7

After Islamic attack with a knife at Bonn: Never so much hatred.

Internal security: Minister of home affairs Friedrich is alarmed: There is special danger coming from radical Muslims – the salafists – in Germany.

Idea reports that the extreme right wing organisation „Pro NRW“ gathered 30 people who showed cartoons of Mohammed, thereupon 500 Muslims came together for a counter-demonstration, 200 of them were salafist Muslims. One of them wounded a police-man with a knife seriously. 109 persons has been arrested. „ I have never experienced so much hate and violence“ one of the chief-police-man said.

The news is underlined with a cartoon. The cartoons shows the speaker of the salafist Muslims saying: „The following hate-filled sermon is kindly sponsored by the Federal Republic of Germany.“ The text below the cartoon explains, that the speaker of the Koran distribution campaign receives unemployment benefit by the social welfare.

31.05.201, idea Spektrum 22, p. 3

I will not be intimidated by anyone!

Extreme Muslims are called upon via internet to kill critical Germans. How should Christians handle this?

The speaker of the division „Islam“ of the German Evangelical Alliance writes a commentary, that God will judge and not man, and calls on Muslims to distance themselves from violence.

**What does this kind of „news“ for Christians have in common?**

1. **There is hardly any positive notice or news about what Muslims in Germany or in the world think, believe or do. A „Normal life“ of Muslims in Germany does not exist, if you take just this news as basis for your knowledge.**
2. **The headlines are normally full of fear, violence or war-terminology.**
3. **The action that is recommended is to fight, make a strong statement and not accept anything what is Muslim in the presented way.**
4. **The feelings the reader should have are anger, fear, powerlessness and the need to fight against Islamic terrorism and religion.**

### **Cartoons about Muslims in the Internet**

Because of the characteristics of the internet there is not a hierarchy of cartoons in the internet. I can not measure if these cartoons are read by a lot of people or not. Therefore the selection is subjective and not scientific. It is to give you an impression, that Muslims are shown as dangerous and primitive people, fighting until death for their ideology.

### **What should the church say?**

- Fear is not a good counsel and advisor.
- Baptists have struggled from their beginnings for freedom of speech and religion. This freedom must be a freedom even for Muslims.
- *„We consider religious freedom not only for ourselves, but we claim it for every human, who lives in our home country, we claim it to the same extent for all, whether they be Christians, Jews, Muslims or anything else.“ (Julius Köbner, 1848)*
- I am disappointed about the military language and the warlike approach which is created by idea against Muslims. Of course, someone could say, this is just an reaction to radical actions of Muslims, but this is not passing the test: The distribution of copies of the Koran must not be devaluated as „catching souls“, if missionary action of Christians is not accepted to be measured in like manner.
- „Love your enemies“ – should be the measuring stick for anybody, so for Muslims also.
- The Christian manner of sharing their faith and actions should be guided by Luke 6,27-35 and Rom 12:20-21. Christians should offer the freedom they desire in Islamic countries as well, but they should not put this on any condition.
- Am I being naive and innocent? May be, then explain it to me, but I want Christians to stand for freedom and peace, in words and action – face to face with anybody.
- Christians should not fight for the truth only, but for relationships with anybody as well. Most of the criticism in „idea“ is written without any personal relationship to any Muslim, but sitting in armchair and criticising the world outside, without living with these people in the world.
- At the Theological Seminary Elstal of the German Baptist Union we have „Mission and diaconical studies“ as one main subject. Michael Kisskalt is very much involved in teaching Islam and organizing meetings with people of different religions and cultural backgrounds.
- To publish these thoughts is necessary to reject violent speech with non-violent publicity.