

**THEOLOGY OR STUDY of RELIGION ? AN INTERVIEW WITH
PROF. DR. CHRISTOPH BOCHINGER***

Yunus Emre AKBAY**

Yunus Emre AKBAY (YEA): Thank you for accepting the interview suggestion. I would like to ask the questions one by one:

The first question is how could you describe and summarize the development of the religion studies in Germany?

Prof.Dr.Christoph Bochinger(CB)**:**A very comprehensive question indeed that cannot be answered only on the basis of Germany's development in Religious Studies as the development is interconnected with the developments in France, Great Britain and other Western European countries which date back to the 19th century. So the German term Religions Wissenschaft, as we call it, was coined by the famous German scholar Friedrich Max Müller, a lecturer in Oriental Languages at the University of Oxford. Having the first international connection in this respect, he was also a member of the language faculty; meaning that not only theology but also the faculties (*la faculté* in French) of language and literature is of importance in means of source for the Religions Wissenschaft. Editing lots of oriental text, especially from India, he invented a huge series of books titled *Sacred Books of the East* and many others. From a language and literature point of view this source is one of the main sources in the studies from antiquity to the beginnings of religions including Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.

Secondly, theology and anthropology have become an additional source for the German scholar Max Weber, where again anthropology and sociology surpass the theological ones. Weber earned reputation with his books on religion especially with his questioning Protestantism – why and how Protestantism is connected with the development of modern industrial societies in Germany, France, Great Britain as well as Northern America. Throughout his life, starting from his famous book on Protestantism and the structure of modern liberal enterprises, he surmised that there

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is a particular connection between Calvinist ethics and the gatherings which lead people to build huge industrial complexes which was never the case throughout world's history. He questioned the fact that why did all these not happen in China or India, where better progressions, such as mathematics, took place.

As of Weber's question, the Religions Wissenschaft in Germany took this as the basis of their study. Theology becomes the third source for this study from the faculties of theology. Much effort was made, especially the protestant theology dealing with the historical and critical analysis of the Bible, which was developed in the 18th and 19th centuries. They criticized the Divine origin of the Bible (!) Yes, theologians did that. In order to find out what really happened to these text in history they posed questions such as; how did they came to being, what kind of a sociological context did they have, and how were all these connected with other religions (namely the close oriental countries' religions). Their approach to theology had sociological basis, which was similar to many other researchers' way of questioning religion and sacred texts from a human nature point of view. This, of course, does not blink the fact that there were revelations; this has not become a matter of discussion. Not to mention they assert that the human development should be investigated since Hebrew Bible came into existence 800 years before the latest text. The Old Testament and New Testament issue is a matter dating 150 years. This means, those generations in between prepared the present New Testament, which definitely requires a sociological study to see what happened to the structure of the texts in time. From the very beginning, what did people start writing down about the life and stories of Jesus, and what is the underlying reason for them to do that, what were their resource?

In means of theology, mission studies are of an important source, as the missionaries were often the very first to exactly study non-Christian religions at regions such as Africa and the Pacific. For they lived in those areas, they went after to convert them to Christianity, and in order to make this possible and achieve this, as well as translate the Bible in to their languages they had to practice the religion and the culture of that particular region.

These missionaries turned out to be very good scholars, already in the 18th century. There was a famous scholar from Germany, Barthelomeos Siegenbike. He was in the South Indian Colony of Denmark, Trenkeba. There he wrote many valuable books, including *Die Religion Der Malaba – The Religion of the Malaba*. He learnt Sanskrit, and even the local dialects of Indian languages, he spoke with the Brahman people of the Hindu religion, getting in touch with some Muslim scholars and get to know Islam there. There are many interesting documents in the Franke Foundations, in Halle, where I studied my habilitation thesis.

So these are some of the several sources all stemming from the 19th century. The voices of the first professors to study religion were heard around 1819...

Today, we have a quite different situation; having around 20 chairs for the study of religions independent from the Faculty of Theology, for instance here in Bayreuth it is under the name of the Faculty of Cultural Studies, or in Leipzig it is

the Faculty of Philosophy where Religion Wissenschaft is a part of the faculty, or in Marburg it is also under the name of Cultural Studies. As far as I know, these are the faculties with their researches exerting themselves in the particular field of study. Replacing the name Mission Studies, Intercultural Theology or Religious Studies have chairs with the number of 20 equal to the ones independent from the Faculty of Theology, mentioned before. In Germany, the system goes different from the ones in Turkey at the Faculty of Theology. For example, if it is a Christian Theology Faculty, it is divided into Catholic and Protestant Faculties. If you are working in one of these you have to be a Catholic at a Catholic Faculty, and a Protestant at a Protestant Faculty. I can see and say that you do not have such restrictions in Turkey. This is quite a big problem in my country, because for me Religions Wissenschaft has nothing to do with Confessional Studies, they have to be free from each other. To give an example, in Marburg, if there is a position at the Faculty of Protestantism, the applicant must be a Protestant, otherwise s/he would get rejected. With a political touch things were aimed to be changed, but the Church did not want such a change, because the Church has a powerful authority here in Germany, where it has the right to intervene in any state affair like the universities.

Well, what we have in Germany is an antagonistic one. As a matter of fact, this has not become a problem between the colleagues of both sides. I, myself, studied both theology and Religions Wissenschaft at the same time in Munich. Now, I am a Professor on the Cultural Studies, more of a secular side; but of course this does not change the fact that I have close contacts with the Professors on the theological side. So to say, this is not a personal problem, this is an institutional problem in Germany, and seems very difficult to be solved. And I guess we are unique in this kind of a problem in the World. Other countries such as Great Britain, the Netherlands, or Scandinavian countries have quite a different situation than ours.

YEA: Could you please enlarge the advantages and the disadvantages of the division?

CB: Do you mean the advantages and disadvantages between Theology and the Study of Religion?

YEA: Yes, I do. Please.

CB: This is my personal view, but as the president of the German Association for the Study of Religions, I am speaking for a big majority of 350 members and for me, there must be a clear differentiation between theology and the Study of Religions. Both are necessary and I do not criticize the Theological Side, for there is the fact that I am a theologian myself which I liked to do in my earlier years and I am still benefitting from those years in means of knowledge for my present tasks. But I think there has to be a clear differentiation between them. For me, if you are on the theology side, there are certain requirements that you need to fulfil, for you are representing a part of the society, and intellectually you are

expected to both know any religious source and sacred scriptures and develop new solutions for the present problems using this knowledge by analysing both sides. Religion has its basis almost in any field, so to say we can include medicine or intercultural affairs to this, and it is a crucial task for a theologian to be open to any question posed related to the modern developments. Here in Germany, we have quite a good amount of skilled theologians working intensively on Islam, for we have so many Muslims living in this country, and it has somehow become a part of our (the Christian theologians) task to consider the integration and disintegration.

In the Christian tradition, many say that “Muhammad is not a prophet”, and that “he has copied many from the Bible claiming that Qur’an is his own product”. Can we really trust all these claims? Do we really have to act according to these long-established traditions? Aren’t all these destroying everything positive in means of integration and living happily with each other? And in my opinion, I believe it is the task of a theologian to detect and solve and overcome these beliefs. A nice example can be given from the Catholic Academy in Stuttgart, inviting Muslims and discussing on the same footing, there is not even a bit of a feeling of class distinction. They are aware of the fact that only theologians can manage this by trying to overcome the problems. Of course, this is not the only task a theologian has to do, dealing with the Bible and Church history is also another task of the theologians at the Faculties of Theology in Germany; which is quite comparable with the Faculties of ilahiyat in Turkey, from an Islamic side. Not to forget to mention, modern society does need a secular approach independent from a religious point of view. I, myself, a Christian trained as a Protestant theologian should break from my own background and try to approach to certain things from an independent and secular point in order to understand, for example, why Hebrew or other religions think different from my own religion believing that theirs are ultimately important. It is very important for me that the modern state should deal with different religions in Germany, for instance, the biggest percentage of group in Germany is the non-confessionals. So we have about 30% Protestants, 30% Catholics, 5% Muslims, some Orthodox Christians from different nationalities, such as Russians, Africans, and Asians, plus, there are Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus.

Last year I was at a conference in Istanbul. There, they informed us that the total number of the Christians in Turkey was less than 100.000 people. The number of Hindus in Germany passes the Christian population in Turkey. So the distribution and the religious diversity in Germany are quite different from the one in Turkey, where the population percentage of other religions is considerably low.

So in the present case, the German state needs a university or institute with a different independent point of approach. For, one cannot deal with Religion from only a Christian view point, which is not a good idea. I think the only way to achieve this is to have a kind of secular study of religion. When I started teaching on Islam or Christianity I used to use the traditional way of speaking of Qur’an. I said “Prophet Muhammad said this and that.” And then some Muslim students replied “Sorry, it is not the Prophet Muhammad but Allah saying this and that in the

Qur'an." And then I thought what I can do, as an expert I cannot use such phrases "Allah said this and that." Now, I am more careful in order not to harm the Muslim. I found an appropriate way, so instead of "Muhammad said" I used "the Qur'an says." I also know that I cannot just say "Allah says", because this is the centre of shahadah. And it is the Prophet's task to help reveal the Qur'an. It is not Prophet but Allah for Muslims, and we in Germany need to be able to make the difference. There is one more thing, that is, Muslims can make the difference, but other students at school are not able to perceive it, so this requires me to say "Muslims believe that Allah revealed the Qur'an." Do you understand my point of difference?

YEA: Yes, I do understand the difference. It is all clear. What about the shortcomings and problems? Do you think that this division somehow causes a conflict between the Faculty of Theology and the Study of Religion?

CB: Yes, there is one shortcoming; I had a very long discussion with some colleagues in Frankfurt at one of the centres of Islamische Theology, with Ömer ÖZSOY and Abdulhakim, both from Turkey. They invited me to have a discussion exactly on this topic on the differences between theology and the study of religions at their department in Frankfurt. We had a very good and intensive discussion with Ömer ÖZSOY, and he made a positive comment on the distinction we have made between theology and the study of religion.

On the one hand, of course, I felt that it is necessary to make some service for the Muslim community in Germany, and help them get on well with the German context and develop a new way of theology or ilahiyat in Germany. As a scholar, I know that we shall not forget that there is no difference between "you and me". I will not want you to stick to my points, and you shouldn't expect the vice versa as well. Many Christian theologians might think that what I support does not reflect my theological background. But what I am trying to say is that there is a slight difference between being secular and religious, so I prefer to be in the middle. This is what I have been arguing and telling to Ömer ÖZSOY and Abdulhakim, whom I appreciate very much, and what they are doing here is very important, and there are people like them in Germany as well, but I still say that having this kind of a multi-religious society requires both theologians from some confessional or religious background serving for their own communities to reflect on the theological basis of what Qur'an says in the case of Islam, at the same time Bible in the case of Christians, or whatever to help the respective communities to come in terms with the modern society and modern challenges. This is an important task, therefore I do not want to say that theology is an old fashion, but it is needed especially in the minorities of the Muslim community as for them it is more important than for the Christians, because Christians have this big tradition they have 750 professors in Germany for Theology compared with 25 study of religions. Muslims are much more in need of people who are intelligent and trained as theologians like Ömer ÖZSOY and Abdulhakim and also my colleague....., he is from Iran... and works in Erlangen..., he was trained at Kum in Iran, who is now in Germany. We really

need people like them. For me, theology is something which has developed throughout centuries, and there is no differences between Islamic theology and in this respect it is an old and important traditional discipline and you cannot invent this discipline in a new country it needs a lot of time. In Germany we need well trained people from Muslim countries to help us to develop some scholars like Muslim theologians. This is an urgent need, but I do not argue that theology is not needed anymore, but at the same time there should be an independent instance called Religious Wissenschaft, and even I think we have the task to help install these kind of Theology Faculties, I cannot do theology of course but I can explain the problem and necessities, and try to argue it politically, and tell the politicians that they have to do something in this field. They need people like us independent from the Christian theology to help them find good solutions. For instance it is not a good idea for the German state to try to invent a new type of Muslim theology in Germany. This is stupid. Christian theologians and the Church would never accept this. They are independent from the state and have developed their own theologies. It is a big problem because Muslims do not have churches, there are no bishops who can appoint the professors, so who should appoint them? Because, Germany is not the one appointing Christian theologians, it is the Bishops. So who can replace the Bishops in replace of the Muslim theologians! These are very difficult problems and they are not solved easily. They tried to solve actually with what is called BAYRETE. Commissions where some Muslims are advising and others accepting their advices on who is going to appoint the members of these committees are again a question. Milli Görüş, for instance, there is no member of them, because the state does not like them much. Is this okay? There are many questions like that. What about the Ahmedies, they are very active in Germany, and should they be a part of these committees? Other Muslims perhaps will say no for the question. So how can you deal with that? There are lots of questions like that.

YEA: Especially at this point, how do you find the services of DİYANET, like sending Imams and some other religious officers?

CB: I think DİYANET had some problems in the past and even if they wanted to solve these problems, they still exist. For me, it is not a good idea to send imams to Germany without knowing any German or being unfamiliar with the life conditions of the Muslims who live in Germany for some three years. Many examples can be given about imams having little knowledge about this situation. Those imams, with little knowledge, are not very strong in solving the problem. I think this was and still is a problem about the imams. We had an imam here many years ago and one of my students interviewed with him. The student was a male and he was Turkish. He asked the imam whether he was getting used to the German society and the imam said: "I don't have any problems, because I have Turkish TV and inside the mosque everybody speaks Turkish." The imam gives Qur'an lessons for students in Turkish. Some of the students do not understand a word, because their Turkish is not good enough. The students spend more time in schools, so their

German becomes better and better. My point is that, the imam should also learn and speak German, so he can teach in German. This way makes it much better for the sake of Islam.

Now, I think DİTİB realized how important this case is, and they need to do some changes especially during Ali BARDAKOĞLU's time. He had great ideas to solve the problem. For instance, if imams learn enough German during their occupation in Germany, they can stay longer when their time ends. This is an important step. The imam in Bayreuth followed this idea and now his German is better and I think this contributes to his work. What DİTİB invented is also a very good idea. He invented an international programme. As long as there are no faculties of theology in Germany, it is a good idea to give an opportunity for young German-Turkish students to learn something about their religious values by going to Turkey and visiting or studying in good faculties in Ankara and Istanbul.

As a result of my visits to those faculties, my colleagues told me that the main problem is that the students' Turkish is not good, which is the same problem in here, so they have to learn Turkish properly. It is good that they have connections with those strong theology faculties in Turkey. But some other problems occur at this point. The Turkish educational system is highly different from the German educational system. For example, we have some students who studied in those faculties in Ankara and Istanbul and now they do their master programme here, but it is not easy to adopt the German system. This is a certain disadvantage! We realized that this is a problem and we need to do something to help the students so they can fit in both systems, because they are somehow translators between the systems. In my opinion, DİTİB and DİYANET should have an aim to solve the problem and it is that they should translate both systems and become a bridge between each other's' cultures and contexts. And I think some other organisations or private organizations in Germany, such as Milli Görüş, are better and more modern than DİYANET.

YEA: Milli Görüş is strong in Germany!

CB: Yes they are really powerful in Germany. They have very modern and able people at least on the top level I know some of them. They have studied in Germany and sometimes they are more integrated to German society than the DİTİB people. Plus, they are more conservative than the DİTİB people.

YEA: What about the students educated in Turkey and come back to Germany to work? Do they have possible positions or is there any kind of a problem in having a position as an Imam or Religious Officer in Germany? What about their situation?

CB: As far as I can see as an outsider observer, this question should be asked to the responsible ones in DİTİB and DİYANET. For me, it is good that there are growing number of Muslim intellectuals having studied Theology in Turkey and Germany. So, if you go to a conference you will see that those people's

German is excellent, because they received their education in Germany. It becomes like their mother tongue in many cases and this is very important, because Germans get to accept Islam in the same intellectual level as Christianity, and that it is not a guest worker religion. This is one of the most important aspects and it overcomes the traditional clichés and stereotypes. People in Germany looks down on the Turkish people because they are workers in factories and they are not intellectuals! That's why we need a level of intellectual Muslims. Now, of course many Muslims are studying in Germany, sociology, history, languages or whatever, they are very able and we need them urgently. It is good to have some well-trained theologians in this field, but at the same time some problems are still not solved. If you, for example, become a teacher in Germany, you earn much more than an imam, even a DİTİB imam. So it becomes a difficult decision. There is a common judgment in Germany that why not become a normal teacher, like mathematics or German, but not a theologian. It is obvious that becoming an imam is not easy, because it is not on the same level as the others. And of course they are paid better in Turkey, but we should still bear in mind that the life expenditures are different in Turkey and Germany. Life expenditure is higher in Germany than Turkey, especially in Koln and Munich. It is not very easy to live with 2000 Euros.

YEA: Yes it really is!

CB: The institution side also is not settled yet. A lot has to be done in this respect but I think it is good that more and more intellectuals are being raised, and there are some intellectuals trained in ilahiyat, otherwise we all know that there is also a tension in Turkey between the religious and non-religious parts of population. Same tension is seen also in Germany, and if only the non-religious side appears, this will pose a negative effect on the non-Christians. If people starts speaking in the name of religious people, then this occurs as a crucial fact that!

YEA: I think this is my main question on the basis of this preliminary introduction; Islam in Germany, what kind of perceptions and expectations are there? Could you please touch upon this also?

CB: I think this is also a difficult question. I would like to compare it a bit with Switzerland, because I have guided a rather big comparative project on religion in Switzerland during last year, so I know many things from the Swiss context, which is quite similar to the German context. In Switzerland we have observed our empirical material and we have observed very funny situations that there are many negative and stereotypes on Islam, so this population says Islam, they are not good in general respect, they suppress the females, they are traditionalists, they are against democracy, they are not able to integrate into a democratic society etc. Of course this is not funny and a very terrible situation, you know this popular ballet on minarets. It was not the government, I always have to say that, because in Turkey people often think that the Swiss government prohibited the election on building the minarets, but they did not do it! On contrary they asked

the population to vote in favour of the minarets, not against. We have the Church towers so we also have to accept minarets. The government said “Please do that, accept minarets, you should do that” but 2/3 of the population said no. They did not want to have the minarets in Switzerland. One of the most problematic aspects of this is that we have looked closer to the results and we have made some interviews with the Swiss people, some of them being our friends, and seen that more Church members voted against the minarets than the non-confessionals. Even the heads of the Church supported the government for voting in favour of the minarets not against. The Bishops were not against as well. Even the Churches were problematic for them, because they have an interreligious dialogue. There are also negative stereotypes and what we have found funny is that there is another Non-Christian religion, Buddhism, which is also very foreign to the Christian Swiss society, but these people are somehow positive to it! They have a lot of refugees coming from Tibet from around the 1950’s and the 1960’s, because Tibet is a mountain country like Switzerland, so they like co-mountaineers, and they accepted them and they are very happy about it, even we interviewed some young Buddhists from Tibet, they are not happy with this situation, because we are looked at as small dalai lama or Buddhas but we just want to be like normal Swiss people. So some positive stereotypes also become a problem. They have similar problems with the Muslim youngsters, in Switzerland there are not much Turkish Muslims, but Muslims from Albania and Bosnia just want to be like normal Swiss people, and do not want to be looked at as specific Muslims – which becomes an integration problem. If we had the same problem as Switzerland in Germany, I am unhappy to say that the German population would vote quite the similar as the Swiss population, though we do not have the same juridical structure. I think the situation in Germany is no better than theirs in this respect. Of course the government is trying to do something to integrate Muslims, they have Islam conferences, but even Islam conferences are not on the level they should be! The German Minister, he did a good job with it, and the present President, I think he has not understood the problem quite right. He always tries to connect Islam with terrorism or questions of security, and I think Muslims are right to say “Sorry this is not Islam and this is not what we should talk about! There are other security problems, also if you look at the radical right wing people killing people, the one for instance 10 Muslim people killed, I think 8 of them were Turkish Muslims. So why do not you look at them? Why do you look at us? We are somehow the victims, not the people who did that!” They are perfectly right, I agree with them. So the German state has not learnt that it is not a good idea to intermingle security questions with religious ones, they are on totally different levels. Of course there are security problems and there are some problematic Muslim groups in Germany, but the vast majority Muslim population has nothing to do with those people! This is one of the questions. The total situation, I think, has improved, because the political side, for instance, Chancellor Merkel, invited those victims of terrible terrorist attacks of right wing NSU. I think her speech was really great, and it was really on the right level. But in the past it was not like that, because the political circumstances were different. So there is some improvement now. The

main reason is that we now have this generation of well educated people from Turkish or other origins within the German system, having studied, they are good and they have become great intellectuals. Now they are able to speak for themselves and defend their rights. For instance they are telling that “we are not responsible for al-kaide! We are a world religion with billion members or more than that. You cannot just look at all of us as somehow hidden terrorists.” But this is still the same in the German population. If you look closer, you’ll see there are lots of problems connected that has nothing to do with religion. For instance we have a problem in the German prisons, and we also studied the same phenomenon in Switzerland that there is a quite high rate of inmates who are Muslims. So anyone wants to say something about Islam says “Islam makes people criminal”. This is totally untrue. If you just look at the statistics, which is not true, but if you look at the “superficial” statistics “it is true”. I do not know the exact percent, but the percent is higher than the percent of the Muslim population in Germany. Maybe around 30 percent of the prisoners are Muslims or something like that. So if you look at this, it seems not a good statistics, for them to say or claim Islam makes people criminal! This is what our colleagues in Switzerland did. They looked at other statistics. If you look at the age average in the population, there is a specific group of people whose criminality rate is much higher than all the other groups in the population. These are unmarried young males. If you look at the Muslim population in Switzerland, you’ll see the same case in Germany, they have more children than non-Muslims, and this means there are a lot of young male and female Muslim people. But the rate of young Muslims is much more than the rate of young males of non-Muslims. These are all normal phenomenon in all societies and you can explain that very well if you have a family and care for your children or different responsibilities and so on you feel more responsible for all the society and the possibility to become a criminal is less than the unmarried ones. This is the explanation for that.

There are many facts, for instance, if you do not know the language the rate becomes much higher than the people who know the language of the country. Unfortunately, there are still quite a lot of Muslims who are not so good in the German language, not only Turkish but also other nationalities who came here recently from African countries. Of course the criminality rate is higher than those people. Education is also an important factor. As many Muslim families came here, it is possible to see that some of them are not well educated and this becomes a big problem in Germany. Integration programs say that Germany has some problems in integration with people who are non-German origin or the German education system is not good at this point.

YEA: How do you find United Kingdom and Germany in means of the integration policy? Do you think that they have a better agenda than Germany does?

CB: I think so. I am not an expert on their policy, but as far as I know from the discussion of my colleagues who are experts in this field, it is my own interpretation to tell that British policy is much better than the German one. I think

it has to do with the British history, common wealth history, of course it is a colonial history, but at the same time they have been using the problems of integration. In their case, these are not Turkish, but Pakistanis and Indians from common wealth states, for more than 150 years. In Germany we did not have colonies, maybe only for 30 years or something like that, they start very late after the First World War, but it is taken away from Germany. So, we do not have this tradition. It is just normal in your class to see different kinds of skin colours, or people from other religions, and British people are used to it. Also it is the case with the society level. On the other hand they are more flexible in terms of religion than in Germany. This has some complicated reasons of the German history, because we had this long-lasting war between the Protestants and the Catholics. So we have a very complicated system here in Germany. In Great Britain the Anglican Church is rather strong, and at the same time it is rather tolerant. For instance, they have a totally different system of religious education at schools, and this is a local system so every city can decide its own school and how they want to be taught their religion, so if you go to a city where there are many Muslims, of course the Imams are the part of the committee in deciding on the religious teaching. In other places, where there are no Muslims or no Hindus, it is just an Anglican school teaching. They are more flexible. The same case is for the theology faculties, they do not have the restrictions as we do here in Germany that you have to be a protestant if you like to teach in a protestant faculty. So what is the result in Germany is that there are no Muslims at the Theology Faculties. Of course they might be invited from the Turkish universities for a week or so, but this is not the everyday life situation. In Britain the situation is totally different. They have some Muslim and some Buddhist experts, and you can have talks on that even at a cafeteria. You can talk about things and say “please do not say it, these things harm my religion” and he explains why! Both sides can understand why and what it is harmful and what is not! You do not have to repeat some stupid stereotypes. So it is much easier to integrate this in the Theology Faculties. I think it is problematic to have this confessional structure in Theology Faculties in Germany. For instance, I had a student who has been interested in the study of New Testament, and she wanted to do her PhD on the New Testament, but she was not able to do that in Germany. Because you can study only if you are Protestant or if you are a Catholic you can do it in that related faculty. If you like to study German Christian theology in Germany, it is not possible to take an exam and do your PhD. This is not the case for Turkey, Egypt or any other country. Christians can study Islamic theology and do their PhDs there. In this respect, universities in Muslim countries are normally much more flexible than the Theology Faculties of Germany, which is again a problem.

YEA: This was a good example as well to indicate the differences between the UK policy and Germany policy on integration and the education system.

CB: But the other education systems are the same. You have Catholic and Protestant education systems. Now they also try to invent the Islamic education. I am in favour of this Islamic education, because as long as the Catholic and Protestant educations exist, there has to be one for the Muslims. Still, I am a bit critical about the whole system in the integration policy. I think it's not a good idea if you separate the children in the classrooms when religion is the topic. They will not have the opportunity to experience that people have other beliefs and they are different from theirs. They should learn these differences at school. They cannot learn it otherwise in a confessional type of education. In Britain it's different. School classes are for all students. They invite some Muslims and some guests to classes. Everybody has to talk with the imam or with the invited one, and vice versa! I think, the reflexive model, again, is better than the German system in the school level.

YEA: Going back to my question about integration, do you think Islamic Law is implemented in Britain more flexible than Germany for local issues like marriage ceremonies etc.?

CB: Again, I am not an expert, but my impression is that they have plenty more than us in that point. There are also some cases in Germany that courts try to integrate. There was an issue about slaughtering in Germany about fifteen years ago. In Germany, normally it is forbidden to do that, because Germans think that it's not good for the animals, they think the animals suffer from that. They think that the animals should be shot by the head first, and then slaughtered. The question was that could a Muslim be forced to shoot the animal by the head and then continue slaughtering or not, without considering the fact that it is against their religion. The court asked to Azhar University in Egypt to give them an advice. They said it was possible to shoot at first and then slaughter it. And then, the court decided to shoot at first and then slaughter it. Whether you are in favour of this or not, this shows that there is a society development in Germany. In total, I think Britain is more flexible.

YEA: My last question on the sharp departmentalization of the disciplines. How do you evaluate it, in short?

CB: In compare with Turkey; Germany is not so structured. We have extra departments for Sociology and Psychology, which are more flexible. We also have African Studies Centre, which impressed the head of the Religious Affairs in Turkey, Professor Ali BARDAKOĞLU, and Ali DERE on their visit to Bayreuth. There are language experts, economy experts, religion experts, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, and biology where we also take part in. They are closely cooperating and they have their own institute as well as their own chairs at different departments, which is very useful because there is a need for different techniques in some African contexts. They learn a lot from experts, and we learn a lot from them. The Religious Studies in Germany are more interconnected to each other than

Turkey. In Turkey there is this problem of sharp division, on one side there are the ilahiyat faculties, and on the other side the rest. They cannot work together, and I think this is a problem. I do not want to criticize the Turkish academy, but this is what I have observed as an outsider.

Again I think there must be a difference between theology and non-theological approaches to religion. This is important because we have the multi-religious situation in Germany and we need a secular consensus on how to deal with different traditions and religious groups, and I think this is better than the religious groups themselves, especially from the minorities. Otherwise they might be dominated by some Christian ideologies about how they should be! This is not a good idea. You have to make a clarification as a Christian theologian that there are some others as an expert and you cannot be an expert on all. Otherwise all the minority religions would be looked at as if they were Christian groups. In the circumstances, I think it is better to have a neutral level of studying religions. This could be either from the sociology, psychology, the anthropology, or from history side which is very important. We have some experts who can compare all these fields and techniques. Our expertise is not only on different religions but also from different approaches.

YEA: My last question, about the Turkish students coming from Turkey, what do you think about them? And what are your future expectations?

CB: I like those students who come to Bayreuth, and this makes our university become more international. We have interesting classes and seminars. The German-Turkish students, you call them “Almancılar”, are in need to learn the German academic language. They studied their high-school in Germany, and later went to Turkey for BA. We have some English classes and some students say “Please, let’s have this in German”, for they do not know English. For the other group, I mean the Erasmus students; they do not speak German so they are a totally different group, and an additional problem occurs when they cannot speak English as well. So we request from the Erasmus coordinators to be a bit more careful on the issue otherwise they feel themselves a bit lonely. Some of them are excellent, and some learn a lot here. I think this is the same problem of our students. Some of them cannot speak well English. Therefore I am a strong defender of this Erasmus system. Students can make use of it. Not only in means of language but also culturally have they learnt a lot. Also what we did now, we had some scholars from Süleyman Demirel University the Faculty of ilahiyat, so that scholars can also benefit from it.

YEA: What are your, or do you have future expectations?

CB: Hoping that the relations grow better, I believe that at the end we’ll all benefit much from it. There are a lot of newly arising universities in Turkey. Some of them are much better than ours’. We have some colleagues capable of a lot of languages, such as French, Latin and old languages like Hebrew. But some of them

are not good enough to communicate in English. They can read but cannot speak well. This will change in time as well with the coming-up generations. Same goes for the Turkish system. This will lead us to a more intensive cooperation. A personal hope of mine is that Turkey will be a part of European Union; in any case it will be an intensifier of our relations not only on the economic and academic basis but also on the humanity basis. As you know I am also a consultant for the Turkish- German University in Istanbul, and I can say the process is slow but has started! Again I am a bit sorry for the German side, because the contribution as compared with Turkey is insufficient. But all in all it is good to have it. More Germans will learn Turkish language with such projects.

YEA: I would like to thank you for the interview. We would like to see you in Isparta as well.

CB: I thank you for making it.