

**Granting of the „Mount Zion Award“ on October 25, 2009 in Jerusalem,
presented by Prof. Dr. Verena Lenzen (IJCF, University of Lucerne)**

In 1986, the German Reverend Wilhelm Salberg (1925 – 1996), son of a Jewish father and a Christian mother, created the “Mount Zion Foundation”. Every other year, this foundation grants the “Mount Zion Award” to persons of Jewish, Muslim or Christian faith, who have significantly contributed to the Jewish-Christian dialogue or to the understanding of the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, in Israel.

It is a special privilege and pleasure for me to welcome Mrs Ilma Lambrecht, who has accompanied and supported Reverend Salberg and the Foundation for many years.

There were three decisive impacts in the life of Wilhelm Salberg: his experience of persecution and discrimination under the terror of National Socialism, as well as the effective help of certain people who acted by the rules of genuine Christianity; his decision, in 1949, to take holy orders; and finally, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which inspired Salberg, then 45, to take up Jewish Studies at the Martin Buber Institute in Cologne. There, as a young student of 18, I met him for the first time as an older fellow student, and he immediately impressed me with his passionate love of Judaism, with his enthusiastic curiosity for the ins and outs of his studies, with his highly motivated engagement in the Christian-Jewish dialogue. These attitudes keep the memory of his striking personality alive to me until this very day.

I have never thought that many years later, as director of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Research at the University of Lucerne, I should have the honour of conferring a prize in his name; and perhaps you can imagine the feelings with which I am standing here before you.

After the horrors of Nazi Germany, Wilhelm Salberg understood the council declaration “Nostra aetate” in 1965 as a turning point in the relationship between the Catholic Church and Judaism. Here, for the first time, a Council acknowledged the deep roots that Christianity has within Judaism, and the fact that both religions represent the same spiritual heritage; it condemned all expressions of hatred, all forms of persecution, all manifestations of anti-semitism; instead, it called for a brotherly dialogue between the religions and their mutual respect for one another.

Despite current irritations within the Christian-Jewish and the Christian-Muslim dialogue, the Catholic Church remains faithful to this spirit of interreligious understanding and respect.

What we need is a basic respect for any faith. This is the precondition for all genuine dialogue and honest recognition of other forms of religion.

In 1933, during the time of God's deepest eclipse, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber put it in prophetic words: "All holiness can fathom the secret of any other holiness [...] The gates of God are open to everyone."

„Jedes Heiligtum kann das Geheimnis eines anderen echten Heiligtums anerkennen. (...) Die Gottestore sind offen für alle.“

This year, on "Nostra Aetate" day, at the end of October 2009, the Mount Zion Award goes to Dr. **Nedal Rashed Jayousi**, the Founder and Chairman of the Palestinian House for Professionals Solutions, and Mr. **Daniel Rossing**, Director of the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations in Israel. They are rewarded in honour of their contributions to increase mutual understanding and enhance interreligious dialogue in Israel/Palestine and peace building in the Near East.

In the name of the Mount Zion Foundation, I have the honour to thank you for your commitment to interreligious and intercultural understanding in the sign of "Zion".

Verena Lenzen