

*Abstract*

The paper, a revised ceremonial address given for the 200th jubilee of the Basel Mission, focuses on the Mission society's change in attitude towards Islam over time. Although the first inspector emphasised with Acts 17:28 that all men, particularly also the «heathens», live and move in God and that all mankind has a consciousness of and feeling for God, he characterised Islam and all other non-Christian religions as damnable deviations of the one true belief. Despite the fact that the first missionaries were cautious and moderate in their proceeding and focussed most of their attention on schools, missionary work in the «Orient» failed. A fruit of these first mission forays into the «Orient» was the famous book *Balance of Truth* by the Basel missionary Gottlieb Pfander. It was translated into several languages and the last edition was published in 1986. Though Pfander was admirably familiar with Islam, he insisted on the superiority of Christendom and lacked – despite his overwhelming erudition – a depth of historical consciousness.

Only in 1894, after the Basel Mission sought a moderate historical textual critique, did its attitude towards Islam change, and over time it embraced a new approach that dealt respectfully with Muslims. In the 1940s the former inspector and Committee-member Emanuel Kellerhals made an analogy between the two religions and the two sons in Jesus' parable: both the prodigal son (Islam) and the elder, who remains in his father's house (Christendom), he stated, are in equal need of God's mercy. Since the end of the 20th century the Basel Mission and the EMS and Mission 21 have pressed for, along with the Basel Theologian Reinhold Bernhardt, a witness-bearing dialogue between the religions and a deferential cooperation in day-to-day life.

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