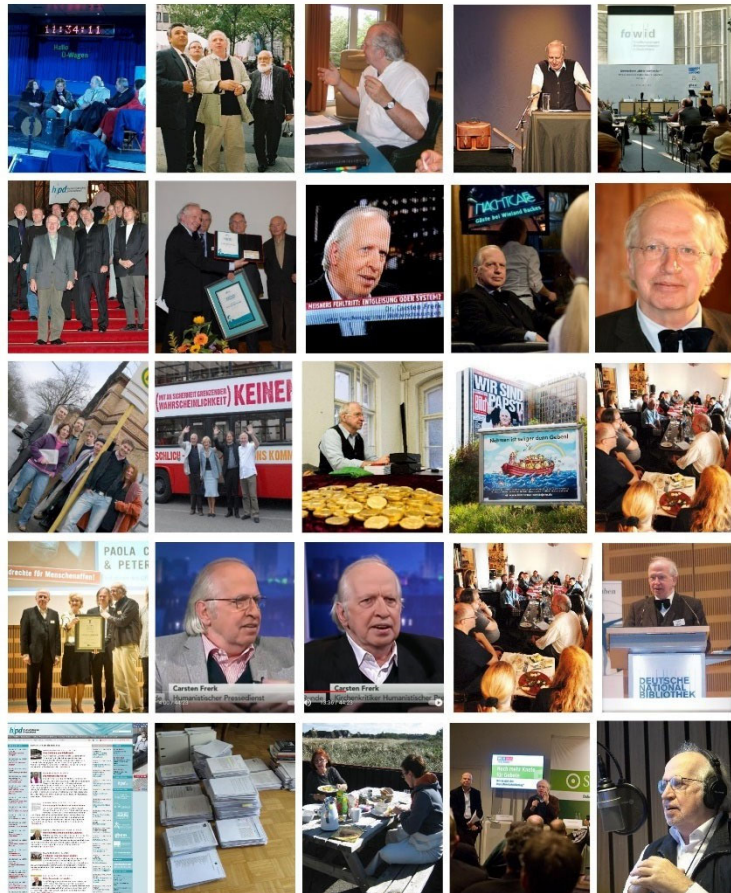




Carsten Frerk + Evelin Frerk

STAGES...

of our lives, in photos,
with texts

...2002–2026

Instead of a foreword

This brochure is a compilation of photographs and accompanying texts, which came about because I have recently encountered several younger journalists in their early to mid-twenties on several occasions, and it struck me that they have been 'moved' by what Evelin and I (and many others with us) 'set in motion'... cannot have any information about! This compilation is intended to remedy this situation somewhat, firstly by recalling what happened 'back then' in each instance, and secondly by noting down some details that may not yet be publicly known.

Older readers may perhaps recognise some of it, whilst younger ones will get an impression of what happened, what was sometimes simple and sometimes difficult, and where Evelin and I were involved – whether centrally or on the fringes.

The layout is based on double-page spreads, i.e. photos/visual documents on one side and a noteworthy comment on the other – if only one is present, there is 'nothing'. In compiling this, it became clear that important events not documented on the internet – such as the '1st Baltic Humanist Conference' in Stockholm in 2006 –

are no longer known. Another example is the founding phase of the Giordano Bruno Foundation, of which there are no photographs. Accordingly, these are not included in this compilation.

It is in the nature of the theme 'Stages of Our Lives' that Evelin and I are the constant element. These are exclusively events of 'public life' within the 'secular spectrum'.

Only a few have been selected from a multitude of events. And there are also a couple of important events – as photographic documents by Evelin – at which we were merely guests.

We would be delighted if other 'activists' could organise something similar for themselves, so that their 'milestones' remain in their memories.

The photos are – unless otherwise stated – by Evelin.

Enjoy!

Berlin, 2026 Carsten Frerk.

Table of contents – 1

2001/2002	Book “Finances and Assets”	6	5 July 2007	Humanist wedding	33
27 September 2002	Lecture at Gasteig	7	22 August 2007	TV-N24 “How brown is Germany?”	34
17 October 2002	TV “Panorama”	8	15 September 2007	Deschner Prize award ceremony with Dawkins	35
Mid-2003	Book ‘Kirche im Kopf’/GBS	9	14 October 2007	Mastershausen, tree planting	36
17 March 2004	WDR/Hart aber fair	10	18 December 2007	Talk show “Nachtcafé”	37
23 May 2004	Deschner, 80th birthday	11	2 March 2008	Unveiling of the Giordano Bruno monument	38
08/09/2004	IBKA Award to James Randi	12	6 August 2008	Interview with Prof. Horst Herrmann	39
30 October 2004	Herbert Steffen’s 70th birthday	13	10 September 2008	Lecture in Osnabrück	40
6 November 2004	WDR/Aachen “Hallo Ü-Wagen”	14	12 September 2008	GBS Advisory Board Meeting	41
22 June 2005	Book “Caritas and Diakonie”, PK	15	16 October 2008	Musical “Innomine Patris”	42
10 July 2005	fowid Founding Conference	16	25 November 2008	KORSO Executive Committee	43
17 August 2005	Religion-Free Zone Cologne	17	25 November 2008	KORSO – Origins, Founding	44
11 November 2005	fowid press conference	18	End of 2008	Planning of the “Atheist Bus Campaign”	45
12 November 2005	fowid Conference, FES	19	20 March 2009	TV – ‘Panorama’	46
21 November 2005	Book tour “Caritas and Diakonie”	20	29 March 2009	Premiere of “Religious”/EHBB	47
22 November 2005	Lecture in Trier	21	2009–2019	Development of the EHBB	48
09/06/2006	Photography by Karl-Heinz Deschner	22	26 April 2009	Victory celebration for ‘Pro Ethik’	49
Aug. 2006	HPD Office, Hamburg	23	23 May 2009	Religion-Free Zone Bremen	50
10 September 2006	Religion-Free Zone Munich	24	April 2009	Bus campaign “Godless and Happy”	51
16 September 2006	Lecture at the HVD-BB	25	18 April 2009	“Five Years GBS”	54
20 October 2006	PK Humanist Press Service	26	4 July 2009	GBS Advisory Board Meeting / Johannes Neumann	55
21 October 2006	Conference “There is nothing good,...”	27	18 October 2009	Herbert Steffen’s 75th birthday	56
21 October 2006	IBKA Award Ceremony: Aziz Nesin	28	22 January 2010	4th Berlin Talks at HU	57
11 November 2006	1st Baltic Humanist Conference	29	16 April 2010	Lecture in Frankfurt am Main	58
2006–2008	“Regulars’ Table of the Cheerful Godless”	30	17 April 2010	Lecture in Cologne	59
2004–2011	Masterhausen / GBS	31	April 2010	Research on ‘State Benefits’, Stabi	60
14 June 2007	Meeting with Dr Paul Schulz	32	16 May 2010	Religion-Free Zone Munich	61

Table of Contents–2

29 May 2010	Interview with Prof. Gerhard Stremlinger	62	12 March 2013	TV Phoenix “Habemus Papam”	90
20 October 2010	Discussion at Humanisten BW	63	30 April 2013	German Humanists’ Day, Hamburg	91
2010 onwards	Home Office, Leipziger Straße	64	20 October 2013	TV Tagesschau / “Günter Jauch”	92
Nov. 2010	Book “Violettbuch Kirchenfinanzen”	65	28 Oct 2013	SAT1 Breakfast TV	93
6 November 2010	ZDF Frontal21/SPIEGEL article	66	29 October 2013	TV-ORF/ZIB2	94
14 November 2010	F.A.S. double-page spread	67	30 October 2013	Farewell as SPD editor-in-chief	95
15 November 2010	KORSO press conference: “Replacing state benefits”	68	29 November 2013	Discussion HVD, Frankfurter Rundschau	96
25 November 2010	Lecture, HU Frankfurt am Main	69	30 November 2013	EvoKids Conference	97
28 November 2010	Regional TV station NRW/RLP	70	4 December 2013	TV Phoenix “Francis’s new plans...”	98
6 December 2010	Lecture at “DAI” Düsseldorf	71	26 April 2014	Editorial meeting HPD	99
12 December 2010	EHBB: 1st ATHvent reading	72	19 June 2014	Regional group meeting GBS, Moses	100
18 April 2011	HU press conference on state benefits	73	28 June 2014	Interview with Freethinker, Switzerland	101
3 June 2011	‘Ethics Prize’ award ceremony	74	5 September 2014	Interview with GBS Switzerland	102
19 June 2011	Interview with Esther Vilar	75	2014 onwards	“My End Belongs to Me” campaign	103
10 September 2011	Vatican conference	76	7 November 2014	‘10 Years of GBS’ ceremony	104
15 September 2011	Network meeting on the Pope’s visit	77	2014/2015	Book “Kirchenrepublik Deutschland”	105
19 September 2011	Large poster “We are the Pope”	78	24 November 2014	Delegation to the Federal Constitutional Court	106
21 September 2011	Day of Action “Away with the Concordat”	79	25 November 2014	Book tour of Lower Saxony	107
22 September 2011	Demonstration “No Power to Dogmas”	80	18 February 2015	Münster: WDR5 News	108
22 September 2011	Mass demonstration at Potsdamer Platz	81	12 September 2015	Development of the lecture ‘Church Republic’	109
26 September 2011	Lecture in Luxembourg	82	10 November 2015	Press conference: ‘Church Republic’	110
24 October 2011	Construction of the new foundation building	83	30 November 2015	SPD Hamburg, Working Group on Churches...	111
23 May 2012	“Atheist Convention”, Cologne	85	22 December 2015	Lecture: Freethinkers, Vienna	112
12 July 2012	“Atheist Shoes”	86	14 January 2016	arte TV: “The Church and Money”	113
2012 onwards	“Pro Children’s Rights” campaign	87	17 February 2016	Commemoration ceremony for Herbert Steffen	115
10 September 2012	Press conference: ‘God’s work and our contribution’	88	3 March 2016	Reading tour: South-West	116
23 October 2012	Interview with Andrew Copson, BHA	89	12 March 2016	Lecture by Freidenker, Zurich	117

Table of contents–3

15 April 2016	Lecture in Französisch-Buchholz	118	8 October 2020	Lecture: “Islamic Lobbying”	145
25 May 2016	Lecture at the ver.di Conference Centre	119	2 October 2021	Lecture in Templin	146
27 May 2016	“Secular Days” Leipzig	120	19 August 2022	SPIEGEL “Land of the Godless”	147
5 June 2016	Conference “Peace and Orientation”	121	5 October 2022	Lecture “DA!” Church Congress	148
13 June 2016	Press conference with Libre Pensée	122	20 October 2022	“Mario Barth Unmasked”	149
14 June 2016	Lecture in Bochum, Martin Budich	123	8 April 2023	AILP Conference, Paris	150
17 September 2016	Lecture: ‘10th Anniversary of KFSM’	124	23 April 2023	Memorial service for Herbert Steffen	151
2 November 2016	Lecture at a conference of the SELK	125	28 August 2024	Non-denominational/Christians: 46%	152
4 November 2016	Lecture: Dresen, The Left	126	23 November 2024	Philosophical Salon Cologne	153
7 June 2017	Lecture: ‘Secular University Group’	127	16 July 2025	Video Simplicissimus	154
21 June 2017	EHBB at World Humanist Day	128	12 September 2025	AKPolis ‘CLAIM’	155
23 September 2017	7th IAF Congress, Paris	129	25 October 2025	Conference ‘20 Years of FOWID’	158
30 October 2017	Luther Year, “The Naked Truth”	130	19 December 2025	ZDF/WISO/Deals	157
July 2018	Lectures on the ‘Church Republic’	131	16 January 2026	Bundestag, Secular Socialists	157
20 August 2018	Lecture at the Ulm Marketing Club	132			
10ff. 2018	Secular Refugee Aid Berlin	133			
12 November 2018	“Secular Human Rights Week”	134			
31 December 2018	New Year’s Eve interview on Deutschlandfunk	135			
2 April 2019	Swiss Month “Empty Churches...”	136	WHO-IS-HU		159/160
06/04/2019	“Who owns the state?”	137	Posters		161
May 2019	Bus campaign “Church state? No, thank you!”	138	Books		162
8 May 2019	Bus campaign in Hamburg	139	Articles, essays in...		163/165
23 June 2019	Religion-Free Zone/“Heretic’s Day”	140			
5 September 2019	German Humanists’ Day, Hamburg	141			
21 October 2019	Lecture in Freiburg / Breisgau	142			
15 November 2019	Lecture in Falkensee	143			
25 August 2020	Volker Panzer’s funeral	144			



2001/2002: My first non-fiction book on the subject of state and church in Germany.

The subject of the 'Church' had already interested me as a student. Yet even my initial research revealed that there was hardly any literature available, only on individual aspects. So I set out on a journey through a Germany that was, at that point, unknown to me. This 'joy of discovery' carried me over highs and through lows. In between, I wrote to secular organisations – previously unknown to me – such as the IBKA, regarding a collaboration. The response: none. They probably thought: 'Another one of those harmless eccentrics who've been surveying the Catholic universe for 30 years!?' Then I contacted SPIEGEL; after my credentials had been checked, I was granted access to the documentation and realised during my visit that I already had more than that.

When I then sent Peter Wensierski the final draft in spring 2001, he said: 'This is the best I've read on the subject so far.' The plan had been for a SPIEGEL cover story for Advent 2001 – back then, SPIEGEL used to give the churches a proper 'kick in the shins' at the start of December – but the 9/11 terrorist attacks dominated all the media. Nevertheless, it was given a prominent place and considerable space in the magazine, and the following day the dpa ran the headline, based on its own research: "The churches themselves do not know how rich they are."



(The photo is from 2006, taken at another lecture at the Gasteig)

27 September 2002: Munich: Lecture at the Gasteig, Black Box, at the invitation of the Bund für Geistesfreiheit, the Humanist Union and the German Freethinkers' Association.

A 'new world' began for me: on 25 September I had been in Augsburg, then – as it could not be organised any other way – a 530 km drive on 26 September to Cologne for the "Talk am Dom", a discussion with Norbert Feldhoff, Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Cologne, at the Domforum; the following day, 27th, a journey (580 km) to Munich; I try to get some sleep on the motorway, traffic jam before Munich – will we arrive on time? No. Changing clothes (suit) in the underground car park, finally on stage in the dark theatre; I feel as though I'm about to faint and fall off the stage. Afterwards, the audience members on the spot tell me that it was one of the most competent, most detailed and most exciting lectures they had heard in quite some time. I am simply amazed.

And I'm learning even more. It was clear that I'd be studying somewhere in Germany, but not in Bavaria. We were now staying in Wolfratshausen with Assunta and Wolf from the BfG. On Saturday morning there was a brunch and Wolf sang, accompanied on the guitar by a senior consultant friend from the Großhadern Hospital, songs by Karl Valentin and Bob Dylan. I was impressed.



17 October 2002: A feature on the NDR's well-regarded political magazine programme "Panorama" (duration: 12:16): "Churches – subsidised by the state".

When I asked the two editors – who were sitting in our large kitchen for lengthy background discussions – "Why now, of all times?" they said: "For about five years, our editor-in-chief has tasked us with looking into the financial structures of the church; we've tried a few times and failed each time because it's too complicated. Your research and your book are like clearings in the undergrowth for us, so that we've now been able to carry it out."

One of the feature's particular strengths was, among other things, its ability to 'break down' the billion-pound sums into smaller, comprehensible amounts, along the lines of: "Even the incense is state-funded".

The report did not go unnoticed, as the two editors were summoned by the NDR Broadcasting Council and 'given a dressing-down' by the church representatives there for having dared to tackle this subject. A wall of silence had been broken.

Screenshot from the report as a video on YouTube, in correspondingly low quality. Top image: presenter Anja Reschke.



Mid-2003: I didn't want to write another book 'on my own', and as I was now a member of the IBKA, I received the MIZ. Its editor-in-chief seemed to me to be a suitable co-author, so I wrote to him:

"Hello Mr Schmidt-Salomon, perhaps you might be interested in a book about the 'Church in the Mind'?"

He had already read my book on church finances and was interested.

To my question, "Shall we structure it in thematic blocks or from A to Z?", his reply was, "I'd be in favour of a satirical encyclopaedia from A to Z, that is, from 'Oh dear!' to 'To hell with it!', what do you think?"

We made good progress with the work. But what was even more important was this: in autumn 2003, I gave a talk at the home of Herbert Steffen, Karlheinz Deschner's patron, in the Hunsrück, and wanted to take the opportunity to visit Michael near Trier. Herbert spontaneously joined us and the three of us had a fascinating conversation. At the end, Herbert said: "I think this marks the beginning of a long-standing collaboration and friendship!" Shortly afterwards, Herbert and Michael met to found the Giordano Bruno Foundation.

After that, both Michael and I had plenty of other things to do. The "Church in the Mind" – a timeless topic – was therefore only published as a book in autumn 2007.



17 March 2004, Cologne: WDR 3 / Talk show “Hart aber fair” / Topic: “Poor marks for ground staff – will the Church soon be without a congregation?” with Petra Bosse-Huber (Vice-President of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland), Jürgen Fliege (theologian and presenter), Father Eberhard von Gemmingen (German editorial team, Vatican Radio), Michael Vesper (B'90 / Greens, Deputy Minister-President of North Rhine-Westphalia, Chair of the German Catholic Youth) and myself. It was my first live TV appearance, and I was, understandably, inexperienced and nervous.

I was sitting (from the camera's perspective, on the right, at the very edge) next to Michael Vesper, who spoke reassuringly to me several times as he fidgeted about during the other speakers' contributions, until the presenter Frank Plasberg finally said: “Now I've got to give Mr Frerk a bit of a nudge, otherwise he'll fall off his chair.”

Over the years, around 80 more TV appearances were to follow. When Evelin asked me afterwards: “Well, how do you feel?” my usual reply was: “No idea!”

Because during the situation I was/am so focused, listening, a question could come my way at any moment, I have to react, so in that respect I have no ‘external perception’ of my own. That's where the training for the appearances helps.



23 May 2004, Haßfurt: Karlheinz Deschner, 80th birthday. Without KHD, as he was known, the Giordano Bruno Foundation would never have come into being. Herbert (Steffen) had come across his writings on the critique of religion and wanted to name the foundation after him, but Michael (Schmidt-Salomon) rejected this: no living person.

The local council and the GBS had organised his birthday celebration in Haßfurt, where Deschner lived, and the GBS had taken the opportunity to invite virtually all the well-known 'names' in the field of criticism of religion and the church. Most were present, and one could then identify the participants by the book tables circulating around: 'That's him, and that's him over there...'. Had the old town hall in Haßfurth collapsed, criticism of the church in Germany would have fallen largely silent for at least a generation.



For Michael and the GBS, it was the perfect gathering to approach various academics about their interest in becoming members of the GBS Advisory Board.

Top left: Film by Ricarda Hinz and MSS on Deschner; bottom right: Entry in the Golden Book of the town of Haßfurth.



8 September 2004, Cologne: Presentation of the IBKA's Erwin Fischer Prize to the illusionist James Randi. James 'The Amazing' Randi had arrived earlier than expected, and when it came to deciding who could look after him for so long, the choice fell on me, as I was hosting the evening. It was a pleasure to stroll across the Domplatte and the surrounding area with Randi – and his laudator, Armadeo Sarma – and pass the time chatting. Over coffee, he told ironic stories about how, as a Jew in New York, he organises the Sabbath, since he is not allowed to work or switch anything on or off on that day.

Randi had become famous, among other things, for publicly exposing Uli Geller (the 'spoon bender') and other charlatans. His foundation has offered a prize of 1 million US dollars to anyone who can provide proof of a 'supernatural' phenomenon. In his acceptance speech, Randi mentioned that he had not known Erwin Fischer and said: '... and so I asked the highest authority...', he paused for a long time and looked upwards – all the atheists wondered who or what was the "highest authority"? – until he said: "... and Google said to me...", whereupon there was a great deal of laughter.

(Left: Armadeo Sarma, right: James Randi, below: Bibi Binotal's 'assistant' to James Randi during 'spoon bending')



30 October 2004, Mastershausen: Celebration of Herbert Steffen's 70th birthday (on 18 October 2004).

Herbert had had several large round tables made and organised the seating arrangements. There was the table for his childhood friends, the one for his fellow entrepreneurs, and also the 'Hasentisch' – presumably named after Hassfurth, where Deschner lives – at which sat KHD, Gabi Röwer, Michael and Elke, Daniel and Ursula, as well as Evelin and myself.

For some reason, the atmosphere was a bit tense – probably also because the 'old friends' were looking over curiously at the table of the 'new friends' (us)...Michael was (as always) wearing his baggy trousers, and I'd left the bag containing my suit behind when I set off from Hamburg, so I was wearing my yellow trousers and a bright red shirt.

Then came the presents, and Michael gave me a signal as he went over to the grand piano (he'd already predicted:

'Turn it up to full volume!') and I went to the stereo, turned it up full blast and the song rang out: 'Who's racing so fast through the Hunsrück Forest? Who's paid the bill again? Who's this fabulous bloke? ... My friend Herbert! Our friend Herbert!'

The guests were thrilled, the ice was broken and everyone was in high spirits.



06/11/2004: Aachen: Panel discussion / "Blessed are the poor – where can, where must the Church make savings?" / Live and public / wdr 5 (*Hello OB van*) and wdr tv / Marktplatz in Aachen with the Provost of the Cathedral and former Vicar General of Cologne (Norbert Feldhoff), the Vicar General of the Diocese of Aachen (Manfred von Holtum), Elfriede Harth ("We Are the Church") and myself (author). Moderator: Ursula Daalman.

Feldhoff and I had already met on another occasion, and, despite our ideological differences, we maintained a personal respect for one another. When he spoke about the transparency of church finances and held up a small, transparent acrylic block featuring the spires of Cologne Cathedral, he promptly looked at me; I smiled, but of course I could just as easily have laughed out loud.

Whilst my work was certainly disparaged by senior EKD officials ("Mr Frerk once again had the opportunity, at prime time, to spread his confused theories"), Feldhoff always remained objective and never attacked me personally. When he retired – and I happened to be in Cologne – I dropped by to give him a bouquet of flowers as a farewell gift.



Press conference at the "House of Democracy and Human Rights" with my two Verdi colleagues Renate Richter and Günter Busch.

22 June 2005, Berlin: My second non-fiction book on the subject of state and church in Germany.

The first book had been well received, and so I also came into contact with the "Church Welfare Organisations" specialist group at the ver.di trade union.

The people were friendly, beat about the bush a bit, and then suggested that the chapter on welfare organisations in the first book had turned out rather short... asking if I could produce a more detailed research project and publication. I wasn't against the idea, but I said it would take time – about a year on a 'part-time' basis – and unfortunately I didn't have the money for it. Immediately the question came: "How much do you need?" I replied, taken aback: "10,000." "Done, that's sorted!" Hmm, I'm not sure whether they wouldn't have agreed even if I'd said 20,000.

Be that as it may, an initial thorough investigation was carried out by Caritas and Diakonie, as well as the share that the churches finance in their welfare organisations: 1.8 per cent, or roughly two per cent. This figure and percentage have since become 'common knowledge', which has also become detached from me, i.e. many people who use it do not know that I am the 'originator'.



8–10 July 2005, Mastershausen: Selected academics and activists met at the GBS Forum to advise the GBS on an emerging project.

The 'Caritas Project' had come to an end and we were looking for a new project and its funding. That's when I came up with the idea that it would make sense to compile an internet archive with data from various sources on religion and world views. I prepared everything, created tables, drew graphs – that amounted to around 100 pages.

When I asked Michael if he had any idea who I could approach to present the idea to and ask for start-up funding, he said: "The GBS? Send it to Herbert."

And so it came to pass – and the first GBS project was born. Herbert called together a group of experts for consultation. The whole thing was to be called DaWiD, 'Data Archive on Worldviews in Germany', but it soon turned out that this domain was already taken and unavailable – the owner said: 'My family would never forgive me!' And before anyone could get flustered, Michael said: "Then let's just call ourselves FoWiD, 'Research Group...'; that sounds better for press relations too, when it's not a data archive but a research group that's speaking."

No sooner said than done.



Photos:
Ricarda Hinz/
Evelin Frerk.

17 August 2005, Cologne: “*The Mother of All Non-Religious Zones*” – “Heavenly fun instead of hellish torment!” on the occasion of the Catholic World Youth Day: 15–21 August 2005.

Jacques Tilly’s spectacular ‘Dinomobil’ (10 metres long and 4 metres high: the ‘anti-WYD mascot’) did laps of the streets and was photographed and filmed countless times. The media need images, so that’s exactly what they get.

The event website www.religionsfreie-zone.de recorded over 750,000 page views in August 2005, and the number of emails we received was well into four figures. It seems that many people became aware for the first time that there are freethinking associations and institutions in Germany. On the evening of 17 August, I gave a lecture at the theatre on the topic: “True Charity: Caritas and Diakonie in Germany”. Prof. Franz Buggle and Michael discussed: “For they know not what they believe – Old values, new pyres?” And much more besides, with singing, a summer festival with costumes, and a very multifaceted “Deschner Evening” featuring films and texts. In parallel, there were events in Düsseldorf and Bonn.



11 November 2005, Berlin: fowid press conference at the Federal Press Office of the Federal Government on Reichstagsufer.

On the façade was written: "Man's longing demands certain knowledge." (A. Einstein)

What could have been more fitting? But it was a mere coincidence, as 2005 was the "Einstein Year".

But it was still good fun.

The Fowid representatives present:

Back row, (from left to right) Dr Michael Schmidt-Salomon, Prof. Günther Kehr, Dr Horst Grochopp / Front row: Dr Carsten Frerk, Herbert Steffen, Bibi Binot, Prof. Johannes Neumann.



12 November 2005, Berlin: With a conference held at the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Berlin on the topic

“The ‘courted third denomination’. Findings on the non-denominational in Germany”, the internet portal of the Research Group on Worldviews in Germany (fowid.de) was launched and presented to the public. Among those present were Horst Groschopp (HVD), Michael Schmidt-Salomon, Johannes Neumann (GBS) and Michael Terwey (ZEDAT/ALLBUS, Cologne).

I presented the various data sources and topics on fowid.de. Afterwards, a woman came up to me and said: “Thank you very much for your presentation! I’ve finally understood what statistics are for.” This could also be interpreted to mean that the fowid concept for processing empirical data could work for the ‘average person’. The user figures for such a specialist internet portal are encouragingly high. The use of fowid’s analyses and graphics in school textbooks, academic papers and media reporting also confirms fowid’s valuable contribution through accessible articles that foster an evidence-based view of the world.



Reading tour 'Caritas and Diakonie', November 2005: Nuremberg, (Trier), Stuttgart, Regensburg, Munich, Augsburg, Hanover

21–29 November 2005 Reading tour on the theme “True Charity: Caritas and Diakonie in Germany.” Monday, 21 November (Nuremberg), Tue. 22 Nov (Trier), Wed 23 Nov (Stuttgart), Thu 24 Nov (Regensburg), Fri 25 Nov (Munich), Sat 26 Nov (Augsburg) and Tue 29 Nov (Hanover).

That means: $447 + 418 + 310 + 298 + 125 + 80 + 602 + 285 = 2,565$ km in nine days with eight overnight stays.

The routine is the same every day: drive to the hotel, check in, perhaps a short nap, shower, head to the venue, check and sort out the technical set-up, wait, a two-hour talk and discussion, one to two hours sitting together and chatting with the audience, drinking wine, back to the hotel, unwind, sleep, have breakfast, check emails, reply if necessary, carry on.

It is that – as all travellers know – imbalance between the speaker's effort – 24 hours on the road – and that of the audience – about 3 hours on the road. But you have to be able to put up with it – to take your own work

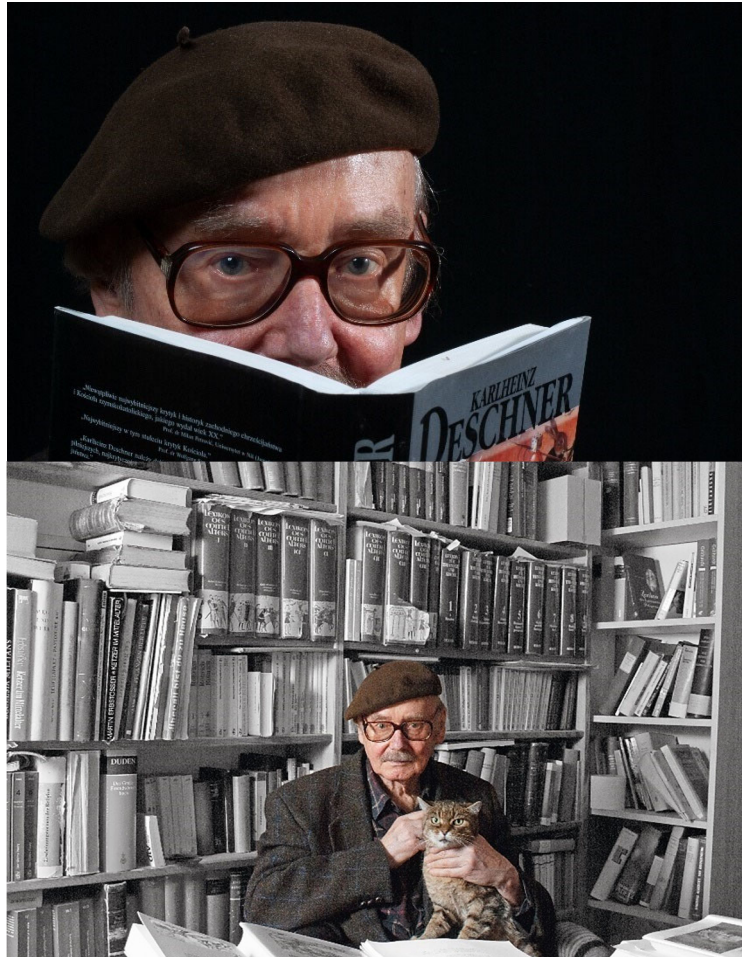
to the people – and, after all, every evening you meet different people with different topics and questions. That's a wealth of impressions that also broaden your own horizons and thus serve 'the cause'.



22 November 2005, Trier: Lecture at the university. Speaking about Caritas and diaconal work isn't exactly the most exciting thing, so you have to make an effort. And to begin with – quoting the bishop's words on the significance of Caritas – I climbed onto 'the pulpit' and, as there is no longer one at the university, onto the podium. The surprise was a success and the friends, not only but also for that reason, were interested.



Jörg Bösen and Michael Schmidt-Salomon were among the audience.



Bottom photo: Colour/B&W conversion: Roland Dahm (ER-DE Graphics)

9 June 2006, Hassfurth: Photography by Karl-Heinz Deschner.

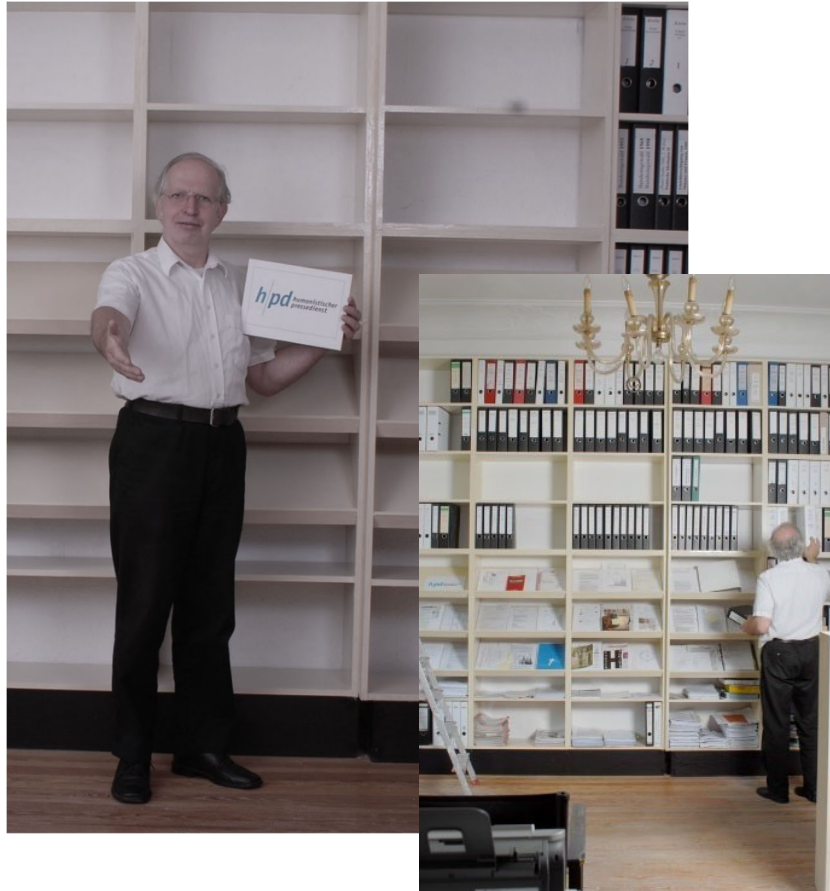
I had several lecture engagements in Bavaria and Saxony, so it made sense to ask KHD if Evelin could photograph him. He agreed.

When I asked how he was getting on, he said: "If I didn't have to stroke my cat, who's always sitting on my lap, I'd be a whole volume further along." In the late afternoon he became restless and said he had an urgent appointment at 6 pm and we'd have to be finished with the photography by then. However



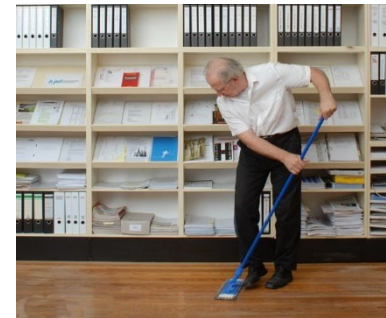
it took a bit longer to pack up the equipment, so it ended up being 6 pm. KHD switched on the TV and the opening match of the 2006 World Cup began: Germany versus Costa Rica.

We asked if we could stay until the first goal. Yes, no problem. The first goal came in the 6th minute, scored by Philipp Lahm, and we said our goodbyes.

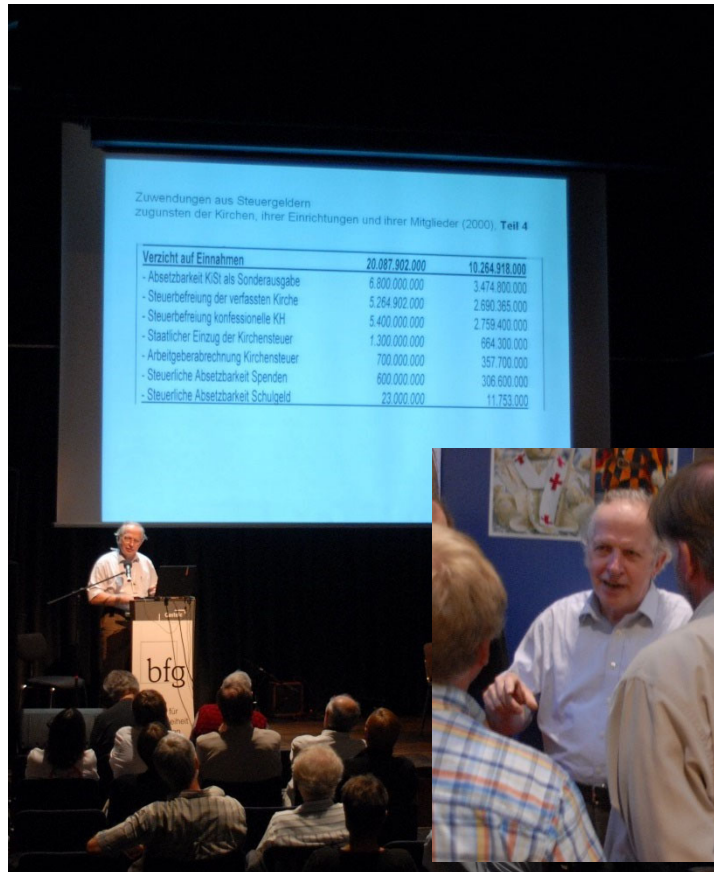


August 2006, Hamburg: In March, the HUMAG (Humanist Working Group) had been formed on our premises. Herbert and Michael (GBS), Manfred Ise-meyer and Horst Groschopp (HVD-BB) had arranged to meet to discuss the organisation and financing of the planned Humanist Press Service (hpd). An annual start-up funding of 30,000 euros was provided, which was split equally, and I became a freelance contributor to the HVD, to whom I sent my monthly invoice.

I was officially commissioned to develop a concept for the hpd, covering both content and the structure of a website. This meant comparing how others do it, seeing what could be adopted, discussing,



... By August, everything had taken shape and it was time to organise my own working situation, the hpd office, make the filing system transparent, etc., and finally to tidy up.



10–16 September 2006, Munich: ‘Papstgsehng?’ – Religion-free zone.

It begins (as early as 6 September) with the art action: “Away with the Concordat!” (The Pope and Hitler march together through the streets). Then in the Black Box, Gasteig, a cultural centre with a perfect theatre: On Sunday (10 September) I’ll be presenting: “And who pays for it? – The churches and our money”, on the financing, the fields of activity and the working conditions of staff in church-run social enterprises, which shows that, contrary to popular belief, these institutions are largely financed by public funds.

On Monday, Michael with “Enough with the humour? – No, enough with the stupidity!” Why the Enlightenment must offend religious sensibilities. A plea for the necessity of the “enlightening annoyance of criticism”.

Then, among others, Günther Kehr, Sigi Zimmerscheid, Tiger Willi and “Free Love for Free Spirits” – hilariously cheeky films. And finally, Colin Goldner on “Benedikt and Bruno” (a bear) – the Catholic Church’s relationship with animals.

With a cheerful and fantastic closing party at the Wirtshaus im Isartal.



16 September 2006, Berlin: Annual General Meeting of the Humanist Association Berlin-Brandenburg at the (so-called 'posh') Hilton Hotel. Which also signalled that the HVD had arrived 'at the heart of society'.

From a report: "The detailed annual report was able to point with some pride to many new projects and successes of the regional humanist association over the past year."

The Hamburg-based journalist Dr Carsten Frerk gave a talk on the topic of "Lifestyles of the non-denominational in Berlin/Brandenburg and modern types of membership". He particularly emphasised that around 60 per cent of non-denominational people are under 40 years of age, and that being non-denominational does not automatically mean one is a humanist. This can also be seen as one of the reasons behind fowid's success story: that it travelled from Hamburg to give a talk to the HVD in Berlin about its (potential) members. Or, to put it another way, the GBS was helping fowid to build up a level of expertise in the social sciences that was lacking in other secular organisations and associations.

Top: The Executive Committee of the HVD Berlin/Brandenburg Bottom: Presentation with a large screen



20 October 2006, Berlin: Press conference at the 'Rotes Rathaus' to mark the launch of the internet portal 'Humanistischer Pressedienst' (Humanist Press-Service - hpd-online, later hpd.de).

The idea of wanting to become the mouthpiece of the secular scene was evident, among other things, in the people around me on the red steps. In the front row (one step behind me) Manfred Isemeyer (Managing Director of HVD Berlin-Brandenburg) and Michael Schmidt-Salomon (Board Member of GBS). Behind them: René Hartmann (IBKA board member), Patricia Block (editor of 'diesseits'/HVD), Herbert Steffen (chair of GBS), (third row:) Horst Groschopp (president of the HVD, director of the Humanist Academy), Rudi Mondelaers (IBKA) and Elke Held (GBS).

Another year had come to an end, as had the funding, and whilst considering how to retain my services for these secular associations, Horst Groschopp and Herbert Steffen had come up with the idea that a humanist press service could indeed be developed and established. There was a need for something like that. No sooner said than done, and I was fortunate that a number of qualified secularists were willing to work for the hpd on a voluntary basis.

Photograph/Stairs: Jörg Bösen



Herbert (top right) and I (bottom left) in the audience.

21–22 October 2006, Berlin: Open conference at the TU Berlin: “There is nothing good unless you do it! – Practical Humanism in Germany”. The symposium was organised by the Giordano Bruno Foundation, the International Federation of Non-Religious and Atheists, the Munich Association for Freedom of Thought and the Berlin Atheist University Group.

The two-day conference explored what distinguishes “practical humanism” from, for example, the social services offered by the churches, whilst also providing an overview of the diverse social activities of humanists in Germany.

On Saturday, there were working groups on topics including “Values Education”, “Let’s talk about Sex!”, “Self-determination in Illness and Dying”, and “Celebrations in the Cycle of Life”. On Sunday, Michael gave a talk on “Organising Practical Humanism” and I (on behalf of FoWiD) on: “Empirical Findings on Practical Humanism”.

The “Children’s Paradise”, founded by the Turkish satirist and avowed atheist Aziz Nesin, was awarded the IBKA’s 2006 Erwin Fischer Prize during the conference.



21 October 2006, Berlin: IBKA award ceremony for Nesin Vakfi.

“The Erwin Fischer Prize is being awarded for the fifth time – for the first time not to an individual, but to an organisation: the Nesin Foundation (Nesin Vakfi) in Turkey, which was founded in 1972 by the Turkish writer Aziz Nesin, a self-professed atheist. The Nesin Foundation operates according to the educational principles of Aziz Nesin on a secular-laicist (not: atheist!) basis: religion is regarded as a private matter and is not a subject of instruction.

*Top photo (left): I had the honour of hosting the award ceremony and am standing in front of a Turkish music ensemble; (right) Prof. Ali Nesin, Chairman of the Nesin Foundation.
Bottom photo: Assunta Tammelleo, IBKA and bfg-Munich, presents a cheque and speaks – in Berlin – in a dirndl / SW photo: Aziz Nesin (Photo: IBKA)*



10–12 November 2006, Stockholm: ‘1st Baltic Humanist Conference’.

Humanisterna (Sweden), Human-Etisk Forbund (Norway), the European Humanist Federation (EHF) and the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) had issued the invitation, and many humanists had gathered. A notable public event was that Björn Ulvaeus (one of the B’s in ABBA) had become a member of the Swedish Humanists in July to clearly position himself against religion and violence.

Even though certain issues are at the forefront (including tolerance, the teaching of values, euthanasia, and much more), personal encounters with activists are essential – for example, from Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Russia, Scotland and Poland – and listening to them explain what humanism means to them. As the Norwegians say at their youth celebrations in German: “Thoughts are free!” and, with five per cent of the population, they have the highest level of organisation.

These contacts then also open up opportunities to speak directly to people months later.

I myself spoke on the “Media” panel about the existence and development of the hpd. A special connection was formed with the editorial team of “Fri tanken” from Norway.



2006–2008, Hamburg: “Regulars’ table of the cheerful Godless”. This was the precursor to the GBS regional group, which was later re-named. (The chair is meant to say: “There are still seats available.”)

We met every fortnight at our flat to share a meal, wine and lively discussions, talking about “God and the world”. Several attempts to get women interested in the group were not very successful. Two did join (not pictured).

Eike (in the checked shirt) was studying physics as a PhD student at DESY in Hamburg. He was the first, and to my knowledge the only one so far, to organise an ‘emancipation celebration’, in which he publicly declared to family and friends that he had emancipated himself from religion. To this end – see photo below – he had invited all the chairpersons of secular organisations to the DESY ‘canteen’, most of whom had attended.

The costs were covered by his grandmother, who said that she could not, unfortunately, leave the church, as she would otherwise lose most of her circle of friends.

After we moved to Berlin, the group continued to exist until the members moved on after finishing their studies, for professional and personal reasons, including to the ‘Brights’.



2004–2011: Mastershausen.

The building in Mastershausen was the (former) stately manufacturer's villa with a driveway and columns, to which Herbert had had a three-storey new building (with its own entrance) built for his four daughters, situated at right angles to it. On the garden level were saunas, a swimming pool and a sports area; the four daughters lived on the floors above. After the fourth daughter had moved out, the building was converted: one floor became the Forum, and on the second floor there were five guest rooms with bathrooms.

Between the two parts of the building there was a weather-protected walkway, which also featured a spacious seating area with a large table. This was one of the most popular meeting places. Not only for the smokers, who had their sheltered outdoor area there, but also for relaxing and sitting together in smaller groups. (In the photo, I am sitting with Prof. Hermann-Josef Schmidt and Dr Ernst Salcher.)

In the main building, directly adjoining this small 'terrace', was the building's large kitchen, so that food and drink were always just a short distance away and caused little inconvenience.

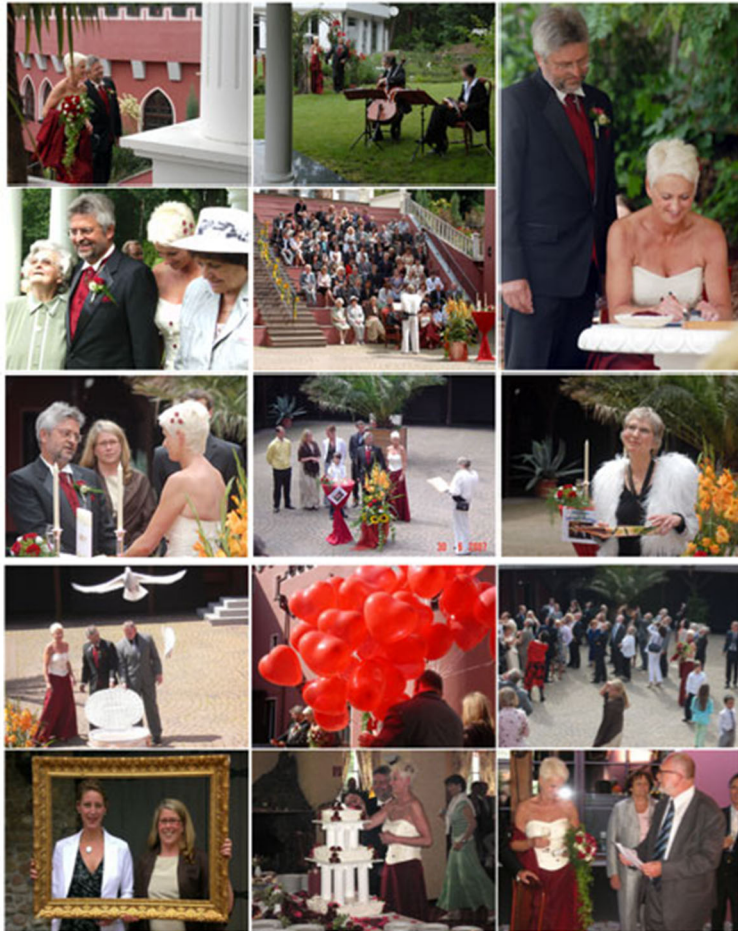


14 June 2007, Duhnen: Meeting with Dr Paul Schulz. The 'heretical pastor' Paul Schulz, a former pastor at a main church in Hamburg and the only person to have been dismissed following an official church 'disciplinary procedure', certainly regarded himself, following his book 'Codex Atheos', as Germany's 'chief atheist'.

A sharp mind and potential ally, whom Elke, Evelin, Michael and I visited at his 'retirement home' in Duhnen – in the penthouse of a block of flats right on the North Sea coast – to discuss the idea, which he also supported, of establishing a 'Central Council of Atheists' or "Central



Council of the Non-Denominational". Michael had already 'put forward' this idea at the end of 2004, but there was various resistance on the grounds that the term "atheist" carries too negative a connotation in Germany. Moreover, the secular organisations did not yet seem ready for this.



5 July 2007, Straußberg: Humanist wedding. Andrea Käthner and the managing director of the HVD Berlin-Brandenburg, Manfred Isenmeyer, get married.

The key difference from a Christian wedding is that the bride and groom, in the presence of family, friends and, where applicable, children, recite a joint wedding vow they have written themselves.





Screenshots

22 August 2007: TV discussion on N24 regarding Archbishops Cardinal Meisner's remarks (Gerhard Richter's new cathedral window was 'degenerate art') with the Secretary-General of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Dr Stefan Kramer.

The Humanist Press Service had not yet 'come into its own', but fowid had already made a name for itself, and so I was invited to Berlin by N24. At that time, the 'secular pool of talent' was still rather thin, and so I was one of the few people available to publicly voice positions critical of the Church.





(left): Herbert Steffen presents Richard Dawkins with the certificate. (right): Certificate of award and cheque

15 September 2007, Frankfurt am Main: Dawkins meets Deschner. Ceremony for the presentation of the GBS's 'Deschner Prize', worth 10,000 euros.

As it was difficult to arrange a meeting with Dawkins, the GBS chose the period of the Frankfurt Book Fair, as Dawkins would be there to present his book

"The God Delusion". Evelin, Fiona Lorenz and I were tasked with picking Dawkins up at the Book Fair and taking him to the Old University. I acted as a sort of "personal assistant" for Dawkins and was impressed by his personal modesty and politeness. Backstage, he quietly memorised his speech, and I organised some sandwiches and coffee for him, as he hadn't eaten anything since breakfast.

It was my first time hosting an event, which I had prepared very carefully, written down and learnt by heart. That way, I was ready for any spontaneous changes. The night before we drove to Frankfurt, I woke up, 'recited' the entire text of the presentation to myself and was able to go back to sleep peacefully. Everything went well.

So, for the first time, I wore my big blue bow tie in public, the one that also adorns my Wikipedia entry.



14 October 2007, Mastershausen: In the park surrounding the building, alongside the landscaped trees, there was still plenty of lawn space that could be used. This gave rise to the idea of planting trees there...

It is a typical picture of the foundation's early years that we all – Herbert, Michael, Bibi, myself and others – rolled up our sleeves and got stuck in whenever there was something to be done or sorted out. So here Michael and I stand, 'as proud as punch', next to one of the trees for which we helped dig the planting hole and plant the 'young trees'.

Each 'young tree' was dedicated to a GBS project – with an 'engraved Plexiglas plaque' between the stakes on the ground – and we joked that perhaps the growth of the trees would reveal how the projects would develop: 'Central Council of the Non-Denominational' / 'FoWiD' / 'Leitkultur Humanism and Enlightenment' / 'Religion-Free Zone' / 'HPD'.

We didn't have much time left either – the GBS was due to move to Oberwesel in 2011 – and so we gradually lost sight of the little trees, as we had to focus on the projects.



18 December 2007, Stuttgart: My second appearance on a TV talk show, and what's more on the 'mother of all German talk shows', Wieland Backe's 'Nachtcafé'. The topic was 'Abolish Christmas?'

They wanted me to be the 'opposing view' to the Regional Bishop of Württemberg, Frank July, who was an important figure for the broadcaster SWR (Stuttgart!). The other guests included the entrepreneur Herman Bühlbecker (the 'Printen' king of Aachen), the actress Anne-Sophie Briest and the author Christine Grän.

In the 'captions' that appeared on screen during the programme (and

which I only saw later), the name and profession were always stated. So 'Regional Bishop', 'entrepreneur', 'actress', 'author'. Mine read 'atheist'. It was (and still is) unknown to me that 'atheist' is a job title.

Apparently, the naive audience needs 'appropriate' labels? Or is this meant as a warning?

I have tried to prevent such things in future.



2 March 2008, Berlin: On Potsdamer Platz.

Michael knew the sculptor who had created the Giordano Bruno sculpture in Budapest, who in turn knew the former Federal Minister of Transport, who still held a seat on the board of DB Regio, the company responsible for the stations, Herbert made a generous donation, the Humanism Foundation also contributed a sum, and so far, the sculpture commemorating the burning at the stake of Giordano Bruno – as a memorial to all those killed in acts of ideological violence – has been placed on the central level of the central DB Railway-station “Potsdamer Platz” in Berlin Mitte.

Come rain or shine: the artist, the Ambassador of the Italian Republic and Ernst Salcher, as a member of the GBS board, gave speeches, and a clarinettist played classical music: thus everything took place in a dignified and official setting, and the GBS and Giordano Bruno now have a modern monument in the centre of the German capital. To my knowledge, there are now Giordano Bruno monuments in Rome, Budapest and Berlin.

(from right to left) Evelin, Herbert, Bibi, Ernst Salcher, Michael, Elke and me. Photo: N.N.



On the terrace of a house, below with a Catholic priest's hat (Saturno)

6 August 2008, Münster: The hpd's first major 'summer interview' with Prof. Dr Horst Herrmann.-

Horst Herrmann became a professor of Catholic canon law at the University of Münster in 1970 (aged 30, and he was very proud, cause his colleague Prof. Ratzinger, the later Pope Benedikt XVI had been 31) and, after just a few years, had made a name for himself throughout Germany as one of the best-known critics of the Church, notably with his "Caritas Legend".

It was a breeze to interview him, for in response to the first question he spoke – covering many facets of the topic – for what felt like an hour without interruption and, without any trouble, returned to the beginning at the end. All that was needed afterwards was to insert a few questions into the text and the interview was ready.

He certainly saw himself as a rival to Prof. Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), and his attachment to the Church was evident, for example, in the fact that he had still kept – from his time at the Vatican – the Catholic priest's hat, which he cheerfully put on.

In that respect, I was not entirely surprised when he published his final book in 2016: 'Free God from the Believers. A Declaration of Love to God.' That had been the core of his commitment against the clergy: his personal child-based faith in a loving God the Father, whom he wished to protect from the clergy of the Catholic Church.



10 September 2008, Osnabrück: At the Free Humanists: Lecture topic: "Are Christians better people?"

The lecture topics were, on the one hand, the books – which was also good for sales – but alongside these there were a few other topics that were entertaining but not substantial enough for a book. At the heart of these topics were always the findings of empirical social research. For instance, I gave several lectures on the topic of 'Youth', and my introduction was: "I have some good news and some bad news. The good news: the churches have lost the youth; the bad news: we haven't won them over."

Another topic was: "The Return of Religions – A Myth?" An examination of the claim that there is a return of religions, including data on church life in Germany and assessments by the population. Or indeed: "Are Christians better people?" A foray into values research, studies on authoritarian behaviour and socio-psychological findings on behaviour in groups – showing that one does not need a religion to have and live by values.

These events in the 'field' were like small plants that gradually grew, becoming stronger and larger, and bearing 'fruit'.



12 September 2008, Masterhausen: GBS Advisory Board meeting

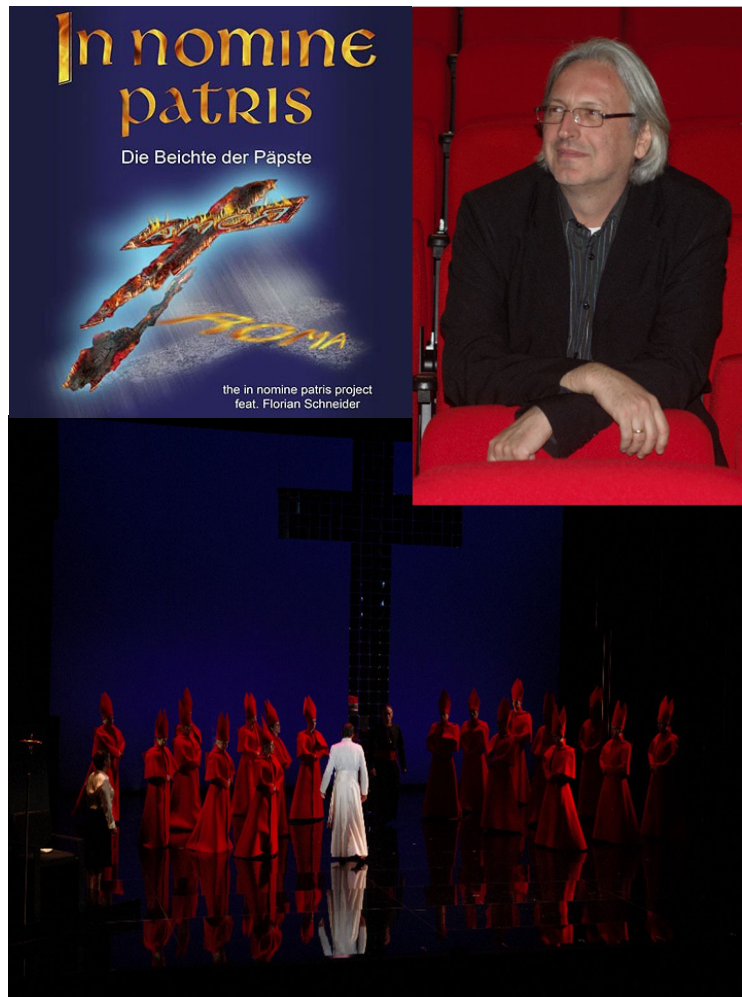
Being appointed to the GBS Advisory Board soon turned out to be an 'honour', as one had to have achieved quite a bit to be there. And so 'luminaries' sat side by side like schoolboys, and there was no competition whatsoever, which was unusual and very pleasant.

The tables went from a 'circle' (2005) to an 'angular' shape (2007) and then to a large rectangle (2008), which just about fitted into the conference room in Mastershausen.

In 2008, there was also the first professional video by Ricarda Hinz about the advisory board, in which the members were interviewed and I was also present. In the background, the round pavilion on the lake.



Dr. Carsten Frerk
Politologe, Sozialwissenschaftler



16 October 2008, Munich: Premiere of the musical 'In Nomine Paris'. The subject of church finances also has surprising side aspects. The Austrian author and composer Bernd Stromberger got in touch with me. He had written the church-critical musical 'In Nomine Paris' and wanted to discuss the details. The musical ran from 16 October to 15 November with 31 performances at the Deutsches Theater.

From a musical review: "The highlight of the show is Dean Welterlen in the role of Pope Anastasius Christus. He embodies the Holy Father with incredible stage presence and portrays the head of the Catholic Church as a man who is as powerful as he is broken and internally torn, unable throughout his entire life to choose between the love of a woman and celibacy. (...) Catchy pop ballads alternate with harmonious choral numbers such as 'Pater Noster' or the rap 'In nomine patris'."

A side note was that, when we needed a Pope costume for the 'Pope-Hitler' demonstration in Berlin (2011), I was able to ask Bernd Stromberger for help in a friendly manner, and we were given the 'original' Pope costume from the musical's costume store. It fit Wolfram Kastner like a glove, as if tailor-made.



25 November 2008, Berlin: The KORSO Executive Committee, comprising Frieder-Otto Wolf (Humanist Association of Germany, HVD), Carsten Frerk (GBS), Konny G. Neumann (Foundation for Freedom of Thought), Rudolf Ladwig (IBKA) and Ralf Lux (German Freethinkers' Association).

The 'Coordinating Council of Secular Organisations', founded in November 2008, has a history linked to the book 'Finances and Assets of the Churches in Germany' (2002).

Horst Groschopp (HVD, HAB) collaborated with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) and organised two conferences with the FES, one in the spring and one in the autumn.

After the book was published, he wrote to the chairpersons and executive committees of all secular associations in 2003. The gist of his message was that the book, both in terms of content and style, could be 'endorsed' by all organisations without any difficulty, and that he would therefore invite all organisations to the next conference to see whether there were any further points of common ground. This led to the formation of the informal 'Review Committee', which met twice a year and at which the association representatives got to know one another personally, with many personal reservations proving to be unfounded.



It had been a long road to founding KORSO, and for Horst Groschopp it was in line with the

“Weimar Cartel”, when the secularists of the Weimar Republic had joined together to form an association.

But as is often the case, a well-intentioned agreement does not bring about a ‘truce’, and the Humanist Association (Berlin) was still at ‘loggerheads’ with the German Freethinkers’ Association (Offenbach), presumably because both have the same ‘parents’.

Thus, the election of the executive committee was also ‘balanced’: the two most important organisations (HVD and GBS) provided the chairpersons, whilst all others became assessors.

However, for the sake of internal peace, these – and other – deadlocks remained significant and only ended after both organisations had withdrawn from KORSO and KORSO was transferred to the ‘Central Council of Non-Denominationalists’ (2021).

Top left: Voting – Konny and Iris Neumann in the foreground, in the background Manfred Isemeyer and Horst Groschopp Bottom left: Herbert signs, MSS stands next to him.

Right: the KORSO minutes signed by all



"The Seven Godless Ones"

Late 2008, Berlin: Several organisations and individuals received a letter in which two advertising agencies asked whether plans were afoot to launch something similar to the British "Atheist Bus Campaign" in Germany.

Two weeks later, an invitation was issued to the premises of "Volks-solidarität" on Torstraße, where 80 people gathered. Topic: "Secular Bus Campaign for Germany". It quickly became clear that this approach would not work, and a small working group was formed from the "seven godless ones", who, in relative silence, managed the complicated process of discussing the content and sorting out the formalities.

In mid-January 2009, the first contacts were made, and within just under two months everything was sorted out: the slogans, the content, the design, the website, the server, the charitable status, the donation portal, ...

It was a perfect core team comprising an advertiser and graphic designer (Peder), a photographer (Evelin), an organiser/local contacts manager (Carsten) and the press officer (Philipp). These four were the 'driving force' behind the campaign, which launched across Germany in spring 2009.

From left to right: Ralf Müller v. d. Haegen, Melanie Wieland, Peder Iblher, Robert Volkmann, Carsten Frerk, Philipp Möller, Evelin Frerk. Photo: Agency.

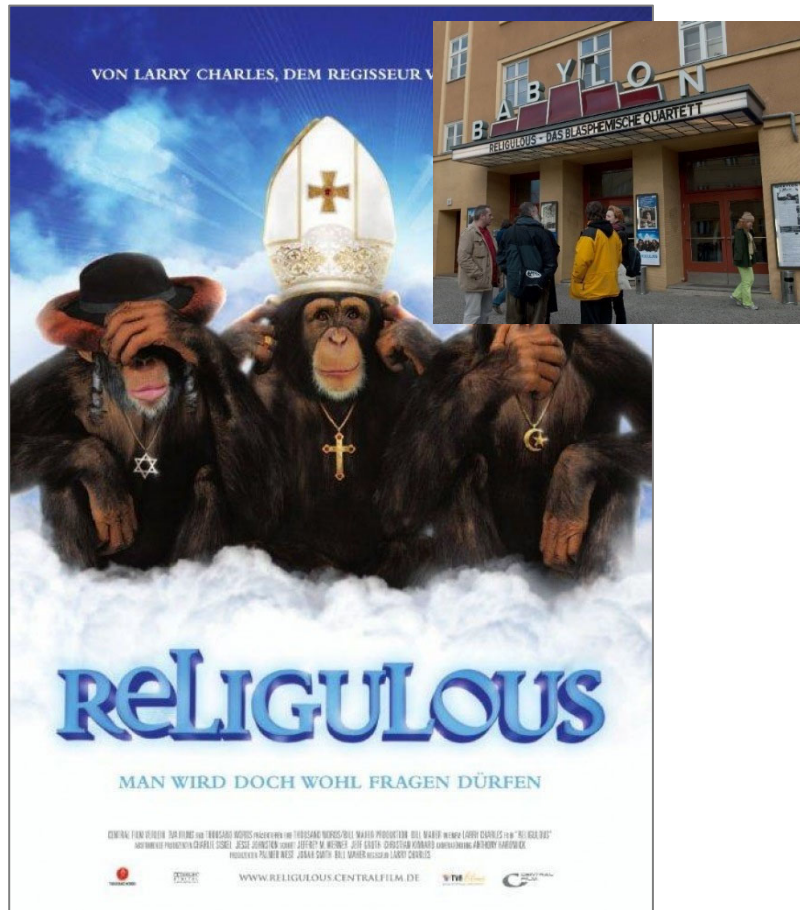


20 March 2009, Hamburg: The magazine “Panorama” had ‘called’ again and I had driven over to the NDR studios. (Tamara Anthony was the editor who had invited me.)

I haven’t actually counted exactly how often I’ve given TV interviews over the years – it was probably more than 70 – three of them were for Panorama – in 2009 (“Old benefices – millions in tax revenue for the churches”). This shows not only my consistency, but also that the topic “Church” has been taken up in various forms by political magazines and that there has been no let-up.

.





29 March 2009, Berlin: On 2 April, the new film "Religulous" by "Borat" director Larry Charles opens in German cinemas. Four days earlier, on Sunday 29 March, the Giordano Bruno Foundation (gbs) will present an "exclusive preview" of the satirical documentary film at the "Babylon" (Berlin-Mitte), a film that has caused a stir and packed cinemas in the USA.

Following the screening, "The Blasphemous Quartet" will discuss the film with the audience and give free rein to their "joy of blasphemy".

Joining the party are cartoonist Ralf König ("The Restless Man", "Condom of Horror"), writer Esther Vilar ("The Tamed Man", "The Enchanting Splendour of Stupidity"), the philosopher Michael Schmidt-Salomon ("Manifesto of Evolutionary Humanism", "Where on Earth is God? asked the little piglet") and the musician/songwriter/author Michael Kernbach. "It's bound to be a right hoot!", promises GBS board spokesperson Michael Schmidt-Salomon.

Afterwards, I passed around a list on which interested parties could enter their (email) addresses to set up a GBS regional group in Berlin, which is what happened. In that sense, it was also the 'founding moment' of the EHBB. ("Evolutionary Humanist Berlin-Brandenburg")



2009 / 2019: The development of the EHBB can be seen as symptomatic of the ‘new’ secular organisations.

In 2009, the venue for the monthly meetings was a basement room accessed via the second courtyard of a building on Brunnenstraße (northern Berlin-Mitte). There was a long bar and plenty of armchairs and sofas. You had to know how to find your way there. The subsequent paths taken by the board members vary greatly. Rüdiger Weida, for example, left the EHBB following the turmoil surrounding its founding and established the ‘Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster’, the Pastafarians.

In 2019, the monthly meetings are held on the first floor of the historic restaurant ‘Max und Moritz’ on Oranienstraße in Kreuzberg, and the annual ATHvents (= ATHeist Advents) readings take place at the Literaturhaus Berlin (in a side street off Kurfürstendamm). Although the EHBB is – compared to the Humanist Association of Berlin – only tiny, it is a participating organisation in the meetings of the Cultural Senator’s Commissioner for Churches, Religious and Worldview Communities.

*Top photo: 2009: 1st Executive Committee of the EHBB e.V. – from left to right: Philipp Möller, Helge Haufe, Adriana Schatton, Robert Matthäus-Maier, Rüdiger Weida
Bottom photo: 2019, Executive Committee election – from left to right: Tobias Wolfram, Carsten Frerk, Helge Haufe (Chair)*



Centre: Michael Sommer (DGB Chair) and Gerd Eggers (HVD)

26 April 2009, Berlin: 'Pro Ethik' victory celebration at Café Rix. A year had come to an end. Following an initial campaign by the churches (2006: "Values Need God") against the introduction of compulsory ethics lessons in Berlin schools, the second phase (2008/2009) was a referendum to establish religious education as a compulsory elective subject: "Pro Reli".

The churches were fully involved both financially (500,000 euros) and organisationally, with Günther Jauch and other celebrities acting as testimonials for "Vote yes! In Berlin, it's about freedom!"

This excess and exaggerated half-truths were symptomatic of aggressive PR work on the part of the churches, which did not shy away from tearing down a whole series of "Pro Ethics" posters.

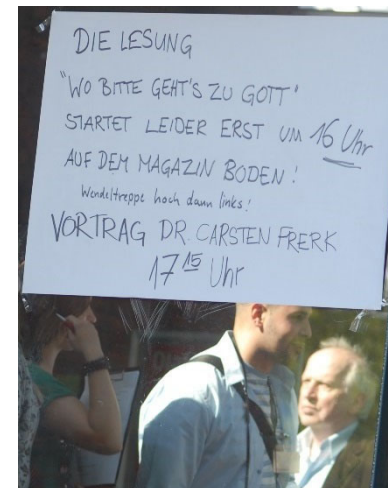
Evelin and I were right in the thick of it with photographs, reports, interviews and features for the Humanist Press Service, for which the 'double victory' was a wonderful reward for us too: in the referendum, Pro Reli had neither reached the quorum nor secured a majority.

This restored and made clear the 'religious peace' in Berlin: the majority of Berliners are secular and religious education is voluntary.



20–24 May 2009, Bremen: Church Congress, and as the *taz* wrote: 'They are young and full of vigour. ATHEISTS: The Bremen Union of Atheists and Freethinkers (BAFU) champions the separation of church and state and organises a fun event for non-believers.'

Several music groups provided a lively atmosphere, starting with a children's party and two speakers: Helge Nyncke "Where on earth is God?" and myself with the question: "Is the Church still on the state's drip?"



The Church and Catholic Days are something of a 'networking event'. The visitors, especially the younger ones, are engaged parishioners who have the opportunity here (for the first time?) to come into contact with secular people, should they have grown bored of singing and praying. These are rare encounters for church members.



Spring 2009. The difference between the organisation of the bus campaign and previous secular organisations lay, among other things, in the fact that ‘we’ were seven people, of whom I was also the only ‘organised’ one. Planning and decision-making took place via a short, direct route of phone calls or meetings. Everyone had decision-making authority, which could be discussed if necessary.

There were secular organisations that did not consider the campaign appropriate at all, as it would create problems with the churches; others were annoyed by our high donation takings (around 45,000 euros).

And the ‘Big Red’ ... was a coincidence. Once it had been decided that we would drive through Germany ourselves, it was hardly possible to hire regular buses for the job. Eventually, we found a white single-decker in Heidelberg. One evening, Evelin and I were driving through Berlin, accidentally turned into a small side street and passed a red double-decker (catering for a film crew). We slammed on the brakes and asked, “Can we hire it?” The reply:

“Nah, he’s too old for that, but why don’t you have a go and ask City-Tour or something!”

No sooner said than done: there were two buses standing there ready to go, a yellow one and a red one with a folding roof... We went for it and chose the “Red Giant”.

DER BUS ROLLT
(MIT AN SICHERHEIT GRENZENDER WAHRSCHEINLICHKEIT) durch NRW!

Düsseldorf 05.06.2009
12.00 Uhr
Kay-und-Lore-Lorentz-Platz
13 Uhr Kabarett-Stunde mit Christian Thring, Martin Maier-Bode, HG Botzko und Jens Neustag
14 Uhr Stadtrundfahrt
16 Uhr Stadtrundfahrt
17 Uhr Fr, Sa + So Filmvorführung im Metropol „Religulous“
18 Uhr Stadtrundfahrt
19 Uhr Filmvorführung im Salon des Amateurs „Die hasserfüllten Augen des Herrn Deschner“

Köln 06.06 und 07.06.2009
11.00 Uhr
DFV-Friedenkerzentrum, Bayenstrasse 11 neben Bürgerhaus Stolwerck
11 Uhr Presskonferenz
12 Uhr Stadtrundfahrt mit Dr. Werner Rügamer
15 Uhr Stadtrundfahrt mit Live Musik
17 Uhr Stadtrundfahrt
19 Uhr Filmhaus: Vorträge von Fiona Lorenz, Sabine Paul und Thomas Junker
Aktionen: Künstler, Enttaufungen, Unterhaltung und Musik.
21.30h Filmvorführung „Wer früher stribt ist länger tot“
www.koelner-filmhaus.de
20 Uhr Stadtrundfahrt

Bonn 07.06.2009
13.30 Uhr
Friedensplatz
15 Uhr Autogrammrunde mit Ralf König und Dr. Fiona Lorenz
16 Uhr Stadtrundfahrt
18 Uhr Stadtrundfahrt
20 Uhr Stadtrundfahrt

ES GIBT (MIT AN SICHERHEIT GRENZENDER) KEINEN GOTT.
EIN ERFÜLLTES LEBEN BRAUCHT KEINEN Glauben.

Warum diese Kampagne?
Buskampagne.de will die Botschaft - ein Leben ohne Gott positiv zu sehen - nach Deutschland bringen. Denn auch hierzulande wird die Aufklärung als Fundament unserer Gesellschaft allzu oft verkannt. Auch hierzulande haben skizurare Menschen genug davor, absichtsvoll „übersehen“ oder moralisch diskreditiert zu werden.

Mit der Kampagne möchten wir öffentlich bekunden, dass eine nicht-religiöse, aufklärerische Weltanschauung eine positive Möglichkeit darstellt. Denn das Leben ohne einen Gott kann eine Bereicherung sein: angstfrei, selbstbestimmt und frei von Diskriminierungen.

www.bka.org
www.buskampagne.de
www.glaubeundwissenschaft.de
www.nachdenkseiten.org
www.glaubeundwissenschaft.de

IBKA Regionalgruppe Köln-Bonn-Düsseldorf des Förderkreises der gbsm gläubige brenne stiftung

While sorting out the arrangements for the overnight stays that needed to be booked in advance, someone had the idea of hiring a campervan to accompany the bus. The van not only had sleeping berths, but was also fitted with a generator and an internet connection, so that I could travel along the whole time and do my work for the hpd in the mornings.

One of the many memorable experiences was in Münster, when the bus stopped for a break. An elderly lady, with white curls and a tray of geraniums in her arms, stopped, looked at the bus, read the sign again slowly, then walked over to the open front door and said to Björn, our driver, in a loud, strong voice: “It’s about time they came to this town – this backwater!” and carried on.

In Augsburg, a group of Christian singers with guitars had gathered at the bus’s (published) stop and sang to us: “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God!”.

When the bus drove into the authorised parking space on the Altmarkt in Dresden, a man suddenly jumped out in front of the bus – and was almost run over – and shouted, gesticulating: “That wouldn’t have happened under Honecker!” Different cities, different customs and stories.



2009: Summary of the bus campaign in figures:

- We reached 15–20 million people in Germany with the campaign;
- The website buskampagne.de has been visited 805,194 times ("hits");
- 500,000 people saw the bus on the street; 44,864 euros were donated;
- 5,081 gods were ignored during the campaign;
- 4,186 of these were deemed jealous and punitive; The bus covered 3,873 kilometres;
- Our forum topic "Does God exist or not, or what?" garnered 2,022 comments;
- 1,750 people took part in a bus tour;
- We received 371 personal thank-you letters from non-believers;
- 253 T-shirts were sold;
- We received 26 personal thank-you letters from believers; We were verbally threatened with violence on 4 occasions;
- The campaign's cost per thousand contacts is €1.60; 0 believers were converted to atheism by us".

Photos: Herbert, Bibi – who took charge of the bus campaign's accounts and ensured everything was in order – and Michael, visiting the bus in Frankfurt am Main and impressed by the 'Red Giant'



Blowing out the birthday candles on the GBS birthday cake (from left to right: Elke Held, Michael Schmidt-Salomon, Fiona Lorenz, Herbert Steffen, Hermann-Josef Schmidt, Carsten Ferk, Ricarda Hinz.)



April 2009, Mastershausen: Five years of GBS. A birthday celebration with a GBS cake and five candles. So much has happened in these five years: 2004: fowid, 2005: Non-religious zone at the WYD in Cologne with Dinomobil, 2006: hpd, 2007: Deschner Prize for Dawkins, 2008: Giordano Bruno monument in Berlin, 2009: Darwin's 200th birthday

The 2007 'trio' at the 'helm' of the GBS Forum had expanded to a 'quartet' with the addition of Ernst Salcher.



4 July 2009: One aspect of the GBS Advisory Board meetings was that, over the course of the hours from Friday afternoon to Sunday lunchtime, there was sufficient time to have quiet conversations with other board members. Such as here with Johannes Neumann, whom I hold in high esteem, former professor of canon law, who wrote a foreword for my book 'Caritas und Diakonie' and wished many a surprised reader 'enjoyment'.



We have 'joined forces' in a number of events, particularly on the subject

'state benefits'. However, I tried in vain to learn from him the art of communication with the subtle, sharp 'foil' to learn, which he mastered so skillfully.



18 October 2009, Senheim: Herbert's 75th birthday at the 'Wine Museum', of which he was a silent co-owner.

A question was, what do you give a man, who's already has everything'?

Answer: The thing he loves collecting most...Money. So boxes were passed round – notes only, please – and around 6,000 euros. Herbert immediately distributed 1,000 euros each to six organisations and was happy: he was able to do good – and didn't need to use his own money to do so.

Everyone was happy.





Rosemarie Will (Hrsg.)

Die Privilegien der Kirchen und das Grundgesetz

4. Berliner Gespräche über das Verhältnis von Staat, Religion und Weltanschauung

22 January 2010, Berlin: Presentation at the conference: “The Privileges of the Churches and the Basic Law” 4th Berlin Talks on the Relationship between State, Religion and Worldview (22–23 January 2010) with Gerhard Czermak, Dirk Ehlers, Carsten Frerk, Stefan Kori-oth, Heinrich de Wall and Johannes Wasmuth.

The conference was structured so that, for each of the three topics (church taxes, state subsidies and state-church agreements), three speakers each presented arguments for and against.

I spoke on the topic of ‘state subsidies’ and my co-speaker, Prof. Heinrich de Wall, struck me as rather aloof. So I sat down next to him and told him some anecdotes, and as we chatted he gradually became a bit more approachable and open to conversation. Then he gave his presentation, followed by mine. Before I had finished, he stood up – the speakers were seated in the front row – and moved to the back row of the auditorium. He clearly wanted nothing more to do with me, let alone engage in a friendly, collegial chat.

His behaviour clearly showed that we – as secular speakers – had ‘hit the mark’ and that the previous interpretative authority of the church-friendly constitutional lawyers was no longer acceptable.



16 April 2010, Frankfurt am Main. Lecture: 'We all pay – How the Church is financed.' The Secular Humanists Rhein-Main had invited us to the Saalbau Bornheim. A venue we could soon reach without a map.

"Frankfurt again and again..." at the Humanist Union (Peter Menne), at the National Library (GBS), at the Secular Humanists (Alexander von der Nahmer, Alexander Tschierse, Jochen Beck, and others). You get to know one another, and yet, as I feel, you remain a 'traveller': appreciated, respected, welcome, but distant. Eventually, one leaves again. In that respect, the two photographs (left) are very telling, as they show this distance.

"Hello, Mr Frerk!" "Hello, do we know each other?" "Yes, from the television" is a typical encounter – in Hanover.



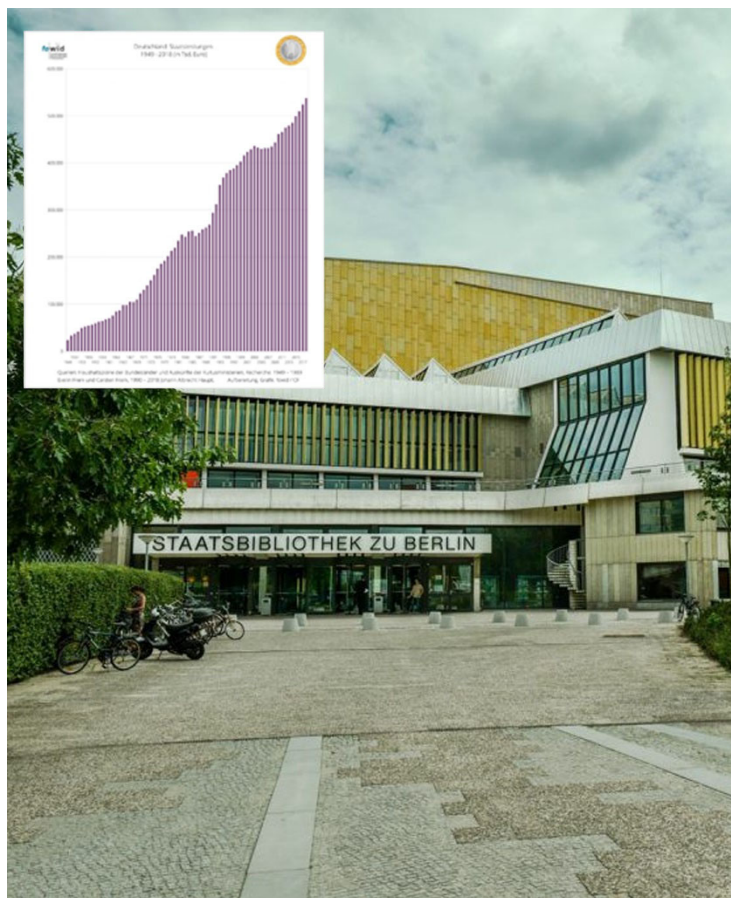


17 April 2010: Cologne, Alte Feuerwache, lecture 'The Lord of the State gives to his own'.

The lecture tours – by myself, Michael Schmidt-Salomon and (later) Philipp Möller – were and remain an essential element for the survival and development of the GBS regional groups. We see each other and stay in touch.

Whilst in April 2010 it was still the “Cologne-Bonn-Düsseldorf Regional Group of the GBS Support Association” that had issued the invitation together with the IBKA, the “DA!” (Düsseldorf Information Service) was formed later in the year – the most successful and effective ‘regional group’ of the GBS.





2010, Berlin: At the Humanist Union (HU) conference, Johann-Heinrich (“Hannes”) Haupt had reported that he had recorded all state payments from 1989 onwards, but that he was missing the data for 1949–1988. State governments and church authorities were stonewalling: “Research too expensive”, “too time-consuming”.

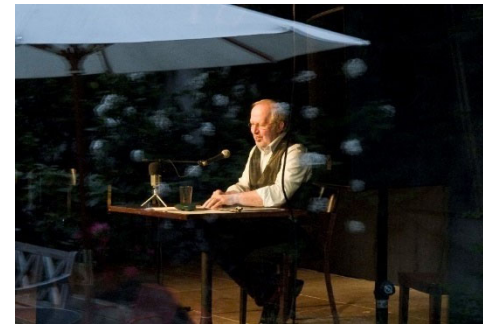
A few days later, I was browsing the (Stabi) State Library’s catalogue online and was surprised to discover that the budget plans of all federal states since 1949 were available there. This covered 40 years of budget plans for 10 federal states.

So we went to the Stabi’s information desk and were told about the limit of 20 volumes on loan per day. “How many volumes do you want to borrow?” Answer: “Around 400.” “Oh! Then please come back on Monday, I’ll speak to the management,” and we were granted special permission to work directly in the stacks for two months and were assigned a contact person, the librarian Ms Ihlow.

When we arrived, we rang her, she came to collect us, and then we took the lift to the 7th floor, where I was given a desk, Uta Ihlow showed Evelin where the federal state was located, and Evelin then wheeled the volumes over on a library trolley, pre-sorted them, and I wrote down the numbers: the first complete time series, which were published on 18 April 2011.



15 May 2010, Munich: Jacques Tilly's "Prügelnonne Candida" travelled to the Ecumenical Church Congress. The three-metre-tall sculpture took part in the "Joyful Procession", which takes place on Ascension Day to mark the Church Congress. It marks the start of the "Religion-Free Zone 2010", a colourful series of events.



Michael reads from his "blasphemous children's books" and I give a talk on "The Lord of the State Gives to His Own" – generally on the finances and assets of the churches and, in particular, on the funding of the current Ecumenical Church Congress here in Munich.





28–31 May 2010, St. Radkersburg/Austria.

For the “Big Summer Interview” for the hpd, I had chosen Prof. Gerhard Streminger as my interview partner, and as he was also on the GBS advisory board, establishing contact was straightforward. Talking, yes, but no photography – people should remember him as ‘handsome’ as he had been before his brain tumour operation, which had left him virtually blind. We agreed that Evelin could take his photograph and then decide whether it could be published. He had retired to St. Radkersburg (in the very south of Austria) and lived there in a house built especially for him, with a dog, beekeeping and a housekeeper who looked after him part-time.

The conversation was multifaceted, and as Streaming spoke with pathos about the bloodthirsty Greek comedies that served as catharsis, I asked him whether the BILD newspaper had a similar function today. We both laughed, and he became pensive again.

The best thing about this interview, however, was that it greatly encouraged him – he even gave his consent for the photos – to return to ‘the world’, to resume his academic work and also to attend GBS advisory board meetings – which, for him – with a driver – was a major undertaking.



Photos: Humanists of Württemberg

20 October 2010, Stuttgart: Humanist Centre. Panelist at the lecture by the Green Party parliamentary group leader in the state parliament, Winfried Kretschmann, on 'The Relationship between State and Church in a Secular Society' at Humanists Württemberg.

In the polls, the Greens were clearly leading the way among the parties, and their parliamentary group leader was regarded as the undisputed next Minister-President of a coalition government in Baden-Württemberg following the upcoming state election in May 2011.

Winfried Kretschmann had already agreed to speak several months earlier, but had only recently become very popular, and the Humanists wanted to position themselves effectively. So they came up with the last-minute idea of calling me, asking me, and the next day I was on a plane to Stuttgart.

It turned out that Kretschmann, a professing Catholic, was more resolute than I was on certain demands – such as that the churches should keep out of politics.

After the election, he became 'Church Affairs Commissioner', but this was only because the Head of the State Chancellery, who normally holds that post, was a member of the Humanist Association, and the churches absolutely refused to talk to him. That is why the Minister-President had to fill this 'gap'.



2010 onwards, Berlin: In our 'home office' at 60 Leipziger Straße in central Berlin, we can easily 'accommodate' up to twenty-five people. It is also situated at the junction of the U2 and U6 lines, the north-south underground connection near Alexanderplatz. It was and remains an ideal meeting place – with food and drink – for preparing all manner of secular activities. When we moved from Hamburg to Berlin (in autumn 2008), Herbert Steffen advised us not to look for two properties (an HPD office and a flat), as we would then have to pay for two kitchens and bathrooms, but rather a larger rental property for both purposes, which is what we did.

And so we had moved into a hub of secular activity, and many organisational meetings took place at our place: for the (1st) bus campaign in 2009, the founding of the EHB e.V. (Evolutionary Humanists Berlin-Brandenburg), actions to mark the Pope's visit, the demonstrations for children in care featuring the 'beating nun' Candida, the demonstrations against circumcision, and the campaign for assisted dying.

It was a stroke of luck thanks to the 'capital city effect' that we gladly accepted; had we been in Hamburg, we would have remained largely on the sidelines of events.

Assembly of EHBB e.V.



November 2010: The most important book I have written on the relationship between state and church is the ‘Violet Book on Church Finances – How the State Finances the Church’.

Ten years had now passed since the initial research in 1998/2001, and the ‘Finances and Assets’ section was still in DM – so something more up-to-date was needed.

A complete new edition was unrealistic in terms of time, as I had plenty of other things to do, so we decided on the narrower state-church section, which was also politically more significant than listing the various church activities in Germany: “From the Cradle to the Grave – Christian Robes”.

The subheading specifies the topic more precisely (“The State Finances the Churches Again”), but there was some discussion about the title. “Violet Book” was my preference, as it was intended to be neither a “White Book” (knowledge/‘whitewashing’) nor a ‘Black Book’ (all that is bad), but rather provide factual information; more-



over, violet is the liturgical colour of humility. An updated new edition, which has been under discussion since 2020, has not yet materialised. No co-author has been found since then.



3 August / 6 November 2010: ZDF / SPIEGEL. The ‘Violet Book’ was not only, in my view, the most important of my books, but was also ‘accepted’ by major national media.

Presumably, on the one hand, because it focused on the relationship between state and church, and on the other, because the figures were manageable – ‘low’: 19.9 billion.

ZDF, with its programme ‘Fontal21’, had already reported in early August 2010: ‘State payments to the churches’. I had brought the other books and my research to the editor in Berlin who was preparing the programme in ZDF’s ‘Zollernhof’. He got in touch a few days later and commented on his previous lack of knowledge of the subject: ‘There are real chasms opening up here!’

The SPIEGEL reported on the book’s publication on 6 November 2010, writing, among other things: “The book is likely to fuel the debate on the future financing of the churches. According to Frerk’s calculations, the direct and indirect benefits that the state has so far granted to Catholics and Protestants and their institutions amount to a total of around 19 billion euros annually. This sum does not include the nine billion euros in church taxes and the estimated 45 billion for Caritas and Diakonie.”

Wie die Kirche in Deutschland sich von den Heiden finanzieren lässt

Es ist einsig in diesen Tagen in der Zentrale der katholischen Bischöfe in Bonn: Kaiserstraße 100. Die Räume der Bismarckstraße 100 sind in einer Konferenzraum umgewandelt worden. Eine große Halle mit einer Decke aus Holz und einer Wand aus Stein. Die Räume sind mit einer Decke aus Holz und einer Wand aus Stein. Die Räume sind mit einer Decke aus Holz und einer Wand aus Stein.

Kirchen leben längst nicht nur von der Kirchensteuer. Das meiste Geld, das Bischöfe und Pfarrer ausgeben, kommt vom säkularen Staat.

Von Melanie Amann

Jahr. Gerade haben der Autor und seine Frau die letzten Monate in Bonn verbracht. Für die Kirche ist das ein wichtiges Jahr. Auch diese Woche wird man sich an den Kirchen in den nächsten Wochen. Soeben ist ein „Violet Book“ erschienen, eine Sozialstudie der Kirchen in Deutschland. Darin hat der Autor versucht, zu zeigen, wie die Kirchen in Deutschland leben. Wie viel Geld die Kirchen in Deutschland bekommen. Wie viel Geld die Kirchen in Deutschland ausgeben. Wie viel Geld die Kirchen in Deutschland bekommen.

Staatsgeld für die Kirchen
 Die Kirchen in Deutschland bekommen von den Bundesländern und den Ländern Geld. Das Geld wird für die Kirchen in Deutschland verwendet. Das Geld wird für die Kirchen in Deutschland verwendet. Das Geld wird für die Kirchen in Deutschland verwendet.

Die gute Nachricht der Studie ist, dass die Kirchen in Deutschland nicht mehr so viel Geld bekommen. Die schlechte Nachricht ist, dass die Kirchen in Deutschland nicht mehr so viel Geld bekommen. Die schlechte Nachricht ist, dass die Kirchen in Deutschland nicht mehr so viel Geld bekommen.

Die schlechte Nachricht ist, dass die Kirchen in Deutschland nicht mehr so viel Geld bekommen. Die schlechte Nachricht ist, dass die Kirchen in Deutschland nicht mehr so viel Geld bekommen. Die schlechte Nachricht ist, dass die Kirchen in Deutschland nicht mehr so viel Geld bekommen.

Die schlechte Nachricht ist, dass die Kirchen in Deutschland nicht mehr so viel Geld bekommen. Die schlechte Nachricht ist, dass die Kirchen in Deutschland nicht mehr so viel Geld bekommen. Die schlechte Nachricht ist, dass die Kirchen in Deutschland nicht mehr so viel Geld bekommen.



Die Erhaltung des Frankfurter Münsters bedeutet das Erhalten der Stadt Frankfurt und das Land Hessen. (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung)



DAFÜR BEZAHLT DER STAAT DIE KIRCHEN

Geld für Bischöfe und Pfarrer
 Die Bischöfe und Pfarrer in Deutschland bekommen von den Bundesländern und den Ländern Geld. Das Geld wird für die Bischöfe und Pfarrer in Deutschland verwendet. Das Geld wird für die Bischöfe und Pfarrer in Deutschland verwendet.

Geld für Krankenhäuser
 Die Krankenhäuser in Deutschland bekommen von den Bundesländern und den Ländern Geld. Das Geld wird für die Krankenhäuser in Deutschland verwendet. Das Geld wird für die Krankenhäuser in Deutschland verwendet.

Geld für Kinderbetreuung
 Die Kinderbetreuung in Deutschland bekommt von den Bundesländern und den Ländern Geld. Das Geld wird für die Kinderbetreuung in Deutschland verwendet. Das Geld wird für die Kinderbetreuung in Deutschland verwendet.

Geld für Entwicklungshilfe
 Die Entwicklungshilfe in Deutschland bekommt von den Bundesländern und den Ländern Geld. Das Geld wird für die Entwicklungshilfe in Deutschland verwendet. Das Geld wird für die Entwicklungshilfe in Deutschland verwendet.

14 November 2010. The Violet Book achieved its greatest media success in the F.A.S. (Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung) with the top half of a double-page spread. Text (among other things) "There is a lot going on these days at the headquarters of the Catholic Bishops' Conference on Kaiserstrasse in Bonn. The bishops have set up a 'task force'. Staff from all departments have been brought together to

refining a communication strategy: [...] With this Q&A catalogue, the Bishops' Conference is seeking to go on the offensive. For uncomfortable questions are sure to be raised in the coming weeks. A 'Violet Book on Church Finances' has just been published, a polemic by the church critic Carsten Frerk. [...] Frerk's final tally comes to 19.9 billion euros."



**Jetzt reicht's!
Staatsleistungen
an die Kirchen
ablösen!**



**Der Verfassungsauftrag muss
endlich verwirklicht werden**

*Oder wollen Sie weiterhin die Pension
von Bischof Mixa zahlen?*

15 November 2010, Berlin: State subsidies to the churches amounting to around 500 million euros annually are to be scrapped without replacement. This was demanded by the Coordinating Council of Secular Organisations (KORSO).

KORSO press release: "The chairman of the Coordination Council, Frieder Otto Wolf, announced the launch of the campaign 'Enough is enough! Abolish state subsidies to the churches!' at the Federal Press Conference Centre.

Political scientist Carsten Frerk made it clear that the direct state subsidies of 500 million euros to the churches are merely the tip of the iceberg; in his recently published book 'Violettbuch Kirchenfinanzen', he demonstrates just how generously the German state funds the churches. However, hardly any politicians appear to be aware of the extent of these subsidies.

To change this and to inform politicians, auditors and MPs about it, the Giordano Bruno Foundation, on behalf of KORSO, sent Frerk's "Violet Book" to over a thousand political decision-makers in Germany, including all members of the Bundestag.

'No one should be able to claim later that they knew nothing about any of this,' explained Foundation spokesperson Michael Schmidt-Salomon."



25 November 2010, Frankfurt, a report by HU: "Religion is regarded as true by the common man, as false by the wise, and as useful by those in power."

Dr Carsten Frerk prefaces his recently published "Violettbuch Kirchenfinanzen. Wie der Staat die Kirchen finanziert" with this quote from Seneca. On 25 November 2010, Frerk gave a talk on his new book at the packed Club Voltaire in Frankfurt. Peter Menne was delighted to welcome Carsten Frerk to Frankfurt for the third time. Frerk had also been a guest in Frankfurt in June 2009 on the occasion of the "bus campaign" ("There is – with a probability bordering on certainty – no God"). This time, too, the event was not intended to be one for accountants – which is why Carsten Frerk lightened the information-packed lecture. He organised a lively guessing game on various state payments to the churches. Topic: "Church building costs": Members of the audience held up signs distributed beforehand, bearing figures ranging from a few million to many billions. Time and again, Frerk called out: "Too little! Who's offering more? Now then, that's too much, we need less!"

Was this perhaps also a new dimension of "New Atheism"? Were we, in our lectures, no longer as staid and boring as the "Old Atheists"?



28 Nov/1 Dec 2010: On the occasion of my lecture at DA! in Düsseldorf, the local regional television station also took notice of my work and I was invited for interviews: on 28 Nov on NRW.TV's "Horné Live" (in Düsseldorf) and on 1 Dec on gutenbergtv (in Mainz).

Viewer figures for both channels were around 500,000, and the interviews had the advantage that we could speak to one another for 10–15 minutes at a stretch without being reduced to the usual 10-second snippets.

In both interviews, I was not labelled a 'church critic' – a role I do not see myself in.



Screenshots: bottom left NRW.TV, top left and right gutenbergtv.



6 December 2010, Düsseldorf: Lecture 'Violettbuch Kirchenfinanzen' / 8.00 pm / ZAKK Studio / Admission €10.

The Düsseldorf Enlightenment Service (DA!) had devised a new event format at the ZAKK in 2010, and I had the honour – in a series of events that has remained first-class ever since – of being the first speaker on St Nicholas' Day 2010. Special blue St Nicholas hats had been made (left in the picture) and the whole thing began with piano music and a poem: "God is kind, God is great, / but sadly short of cash. / Has no money for the staff: / Pastor, bishop, cardinal. / These lads are rather expensive, / church tax is running low. / Help for the syndicate / therefore comes from Father State. / He's happy to help with the pious work, / Carsten Frerk knows the details." (By Wolfgang Klosterhalfen)

The hall was full and it was a very successful evening of talks, to which Jacques Tilly had contributed fitting caricatures (for the interim totals, which were announced with fanfares of drum and piano music).

Ricarda Hinz and Eva Creutz had demonstrated in an exemplary manner how, with theatrical preparation and professional stage direction, even a serious topic can be made highly entertaining.



12 December 2010, Berlin: As part of the first ATHvents lectures organised by the EHBB (Evolutionary Humanists Berlin-Brandenburg), I gave a lecture – as can easily be seen from the decorations I had brought with me from Düsseldorf – on church finances. These ATHvents lectures – an ‘invention’ of the EHBB – always take place on the various Sundays of Advent.



The Freies Museum was a typical Berlin setting. Industrial floors in the rear building, with an ‘open area’ on the second floor that could be used for events – the multinational, rather oriental ‘restaurant’ responsible for the buffet and drinks was located right in the courtyard of the adjacent building. Everything was taken care of – ‘food and drink’ for little money, armchairs and sofas for socialising, space to ‘wander about’ – until two women took a dislike to the unisex toilets and thus brought about a move, eventually to the Literaturhaus in Charlottenburg. A posh address, where one could also spot well-known politicians in the café, but correspondingly expensive, everything very cramped and lacking any charm of improvisation. The EHBB had become ‘solid’.



18 April 2011, Berlin, press conference: 'The Humanist Union (HU) presented the results of an investigation it had initiated into state subsidies paid to the Protestant and Catholic churches, which had been funded by the federal states since 1949: 14 billion euros. State subsidies were also paid in the GDR: 630 million marks. The civil rights organisation presented a draft bill for the complete abolition of state subsidies.

Johann-Albrecht Haupt and Carsten Frerk, on whose research the Humanist Union had based its figures, reported on their experiences and the findings. None of the ministries of culture contacted were able to determine the payments made in their respective federal states. Nor could the figures be obtained via the state parliaments or the churches. This also gave the impression that the various bodies had colluded, as the wording in the correspondence was in some cases identical."

"These figures show once again that the justification for state subsidies based on historical compensation claims is pure fiction," said Carsten Frerk during the presentation of the data. "The level of state subsidies depended far more on the negotiating skills of the church representatives."



3 June 2011, Frankfurt am Main: Philosophers Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer are to receive the the “Giordano Bruno Foundation Ethics Prize”, worth 10,000 euros. The award ceremony will take place at the German National Library.

Cavalieri and Singer are being honoured in particular for launching the Great Ape Project (GAP). Michael and I – naturally (at the start) with the big blue bow tie – are hosting the event and will guide us through the programme.



“Supported by renowned primatologists such as Jane Goodall, the Great Ape Project is calling for orangutans, gorillas, bonobos and chimpanzees to be granted some of the privileges that have hitherto applied only to humans: the right to life, the right to liberty and a ban on torture.”

Evelin and Ricarda Hinz are filming the ceremony. Ricarda Hinz’s video focuses on the key points of the speeches, whilst

Evelin’s film captures the actual proceedings of the award ceremony at the German National Library.



19 June 2011, London: Major summer interview with Esther Vilar. Esther had become a member of the GBS Advisory Board and was thus once again more prominent. She lives in London, south of the City, and has converted a house that used to be a furniture shop for herself. The ground floor is a large room with a kitchen, dining table and living area; the first floor houses the study and bedroom. Her son and his family live 'just round the corner', and the two houses are connected at the rear via a shared garden.

Esther, who regularly works at the Royal Library, explains how she is still often reduced to the 'well-behaved man' and how her plays –



which have been successfully staged in England, France and Poland – failed to resonate in Germany.



10 September 2011, Berlin: For and with the EHBB – in collaboration with the IBKA and the Atheist University Group – I organised a full-day symposium in preparation for the Pope's visit: 'What you always wanted to know about the Vatican'. Should, not wanted.



In tight hourly slots (30-minute lecture, 15 minutes' discussion, 15-minute break):

12:00 The Christian State Church and its new world view. (Rolf Bergmeier, historian)/13:00 The Vatican from the inside. A (former)

insider (Prof. Horst Herrmann, canon lawyer)/14:00 The Vatican and the popes' gender policies. (Ulrich Kessler, LSVD)/ 15:00 The Vatican and totalitarian regimes in the 20th century (Lukas Mihr, historian) / 16:00 The Vatican's finances (Carsten Frerk) / 17:00 The role of Benedict XVI in a modern world (Alan Posener, journalist).

Alan Posener (chief commentator for the WELT Group within the Springer Group) is very impressed that the audience remained seated in their rows of benches for six hours, listening to the lectures. After all, it was a varied programme covering a wide range of topics.



15 September 2011, Berlin: Network meeting to prepare for the demonstration against the Pope's visit and the Pope's speech in the Bundestag. As the main organiser, the LSVD had made its facilities available, and all the organisations involved sent their delegates to the preparatory meetings.

Nicolai Sprekels was there on behalf of the GBS, I was there on behalf of the EHBB and Werner Schultz on behalf of the HVD.

(opposite page, bottom photo, 3rd/4th from the right).

There are many details that need to be clarified...





September 2011, Berlin: From our 'home office' (on the 6th floor), Evelin and I look out over the rooftops directly towards the conservative Springer publisher skyscrapers 'opposite'.

On 19 September, we see that there is a thick 'roll' on the roof of the skyscraper standing at right angles, and then twelve 'facade climbers' begin to lower themselves down the facade on ropes and tension the hauling ropes...??? The roll opens slowly and is gradually unrolled downwards over the course of three hours... To our amazement, the front page of the April 2006 edition of BILD appears: "We are the Pope!" – measuring 45 by 65 metres!

To mark the Pope's visit, the IBKA had had large posters (by Jacques Tilly) printed and had booked several large billboards for them. We knew that one would be on a street diagonally opposite, but there were two billboards there, at right angles to each other at the cross-roads – which one would it be???

The wait was worth it, for that turned out to be the right billboard, the one standing diagonally opposite the Springer Tower, and so Evelin was able to photograph the "secular photo of the year 2011": "To receive is more blessed than to give!"

One of the rare occasions when 'we' were able to counter church propaganda.



Photos: Matthias Krause

21 September 2011, Berlin: “Away with the Concordat” campaign ... Evelin and I document, among other things for hpd-Video, how Wolfram Kastner and Linus Heilig (as the Pope and Hitler) are arrested.





Demo am 22.9.2011
www.DerPapstKommt.de

September 2011, Berlin: Resistance to the Pope's visit to Germany is growing. Critical voices are also becoming increasingly vocal in the media. Numerous events and protest rallies are taking place to coincide with the Pope's visit. Here is an overview of the most important dates from the gbs's perspective...

(Drawing on the left: Ralf König)

Monday, 19 September 2011, 9.00 pm: Programme "hartaberfair" featuring gbs spokesperson Michael Schmidt-Salomon on the topic "Oh God, the Pope is coming – what does Germany think of Benedict's Church".

Tuesday, 20 September 2011, 10.45 pm: Programme "Menschen bei Maischberger" with gbs advisory board member Esther Vilar on the topic: "A Pope without influence: Who still needs Benedict?"

Wednesday, 21 September 2011, 7.00 pm (House of Democracy and Human Rights, Berlin): Lecture "State funding for the churches" with gbs curator Carsten Frerk.

Wednesday, 21 September 2011, 7.00 pm (Umspannwerk Kreuzberg, "Heilige Scheiße: Die Hand Gottes", book readings followed by a panel discussion, with Anne Weiß and Stefan Bonner ("Generation Doof", "Heilige Scheiße"), Thore D. Hansen ("Die Hand Gottes"), Philipp Möller and Michael Schmidt-Salomon.

Thursday, 22 September 2011, 4.00 pm (Potsdamer Platz, Berlin): Start of the "No Power to Dogmas!" demonstration, closing rally at Bebel-Platz with Uta Ranke-Heinemann, David Berger, Michael Schmidt-Salomon, music by Marusha and others.



Photos: Evelin (5),
Matthias Krause (1)

22 September 2011, Berlin: Mass demonstration around Potsdamer Platz: “No Power to Dogmas”. A huge gathering of secularists. Everyone was there.



We have a perfect division of labour: the 5,000 flyers printed by the GBS arrive too late – the square and the surrounding area have already been cordoned off by the police – but Evelin and I know how to get close by car anyway, so the flyers can still be distributed. And the speech by Michael provided a brilliant finale. To thunderous applause, he declared:

“The Pope does not belong in the German Bundestag, but before an international court.” He holds the Pope responsible for a “cynical sexual morality that discriminates against millions of people, exacerbates the problem of overpopulation and promotes the spread of dangerous diseases.”



26. September 2011, Luxembourg: The 'non-profit associations'

- Alliance of Humanists, Atheists and Agnostics of Luxembourg (AHA)
- Ligue Luxembourgeoise de l'Enseignement
- Libre Pensée Luxembourgeoise
- Liberté de Conscience

invite you to my lecture: "How does the Catholic Church in Europe get its money?"

What was special about this was that these four secular associations, which had previously been competing against one another – and in some cases very negatively – had decided to invite me jointly.

The venue was the "Centre Culturel Tramsschapp", a large former tram depot, where the audience of around 400 – and I alone on the very large stage – felt almost lost.

As I am not fluent in either French or Luxembourgish, and I did not wish to translate the talk into English either, I spoke – nice and slowly – in German, which most Luxembourgers can at least understand.

It was a fine success, also for the 'secular cause' in Luxembourg, which – united – soon made progress.



Construction plan (sketch)



Construction site, 26 Sep-



Construction work, as at 30 November 2010 (Photo: Herbert Steffen)

24 October 2011, Oberwesel: It took a good year to build the new foundation building, and now it is finished. Herbert is happy when he can build something, so this project was a particular joy for him.

One day (in 2008), Herbert and Bibi were visiting friends on the Rhine in Oberwesel, who owned a house on the hillside above the town. Herbert, who was delighted by the location and the view, said: "If you want to sell the house, I'm in!" His friends laughed and said: "Why don't you build a house there yourself? Plot No. 16 is up for sale!" That was, so to speak, the 'laying of the foundation stone' for 'Haus Weitblick', the future headquarter of the GBS.

Herbert enjoyed sharing the building plans with some of the advisory board members and asking for their advice and opinions. We, too, visited the building site several times during the construction phase – whenever we had been to Mastershausen, on the return journey to Hamburg – to observe the progress of the building work.

Herbert had been toying with the idea of leaving Mastershausen for some time, and the running costs of the large building (with two saunas, the large swimming pool, etc.) were also high. One of his financial principles is: Keep the basic costs

as low as possible! And the foundation should be able to cover the maintenance costs – which are significantly lower with state-of-the-art technology – itself in future as well.



Photo: Michael Neyses/GBS

During discussions on what should be included in the new residential and foundation building – where the floor area would be smaller than in Mastershausen – one thing soon became clear: a foundation bar had to be part of it. In the Mastershausen building, which had been extended in the 1970s, there was a dark room on the lower garden level next to the ‘wet area’ (with saunas and swimming pools), at the end of which was a bar counter, its walls adorned with colourful tapestries.

Even if there was a lot of noise there, it couldn’t be heard upstairs in the building.

This ‘rustic’ foundation bar, with its converted Wurlitzer organ and the many Udo Jürgens records, was the setting for many a boozy, late-night evening after the day’s intellectual work at the Forum had finished.

One of those special nights was when Michael and Franz Wuketits got into a discussion. When the others had already gone to bed, they went looking for a bottle of wine. After a while, they found a last bottle of red wine in one of the lower cupboards under the bar counter—it must have been forgotten there all along—and cheerfully uncorked the bottle, which they then emptied. The next morning it turned out to be a special wine from Herbert’s birth year (1934). Herbert laughed about it and asked the two of them with interest, “Did you enjoy it?”, which the two ‘night owls’ confirmed with a smile. That was that.

The new foundation bar, which was installed as requested, is, however, open, bright and very practical to use for catering purposes. Of the rustic charm of the former ‘cave’, however, nothing remained in the functional new building.



23 May 2012, Cologne: Talk at the International Atheist Convention (25–27 May 2012): “The Finances and Organisation of Worldviews in Western Europe.” I had translated the talk into English and it went quite well.

A report: “What exactly is the Church selling?” Carsten Frerk wanted to know, and then listed the illusions of the Church’s feel-good products: emotions, rituals, projection surfaces such as “peace”, “family”, “happiness” and “charity”, and community building. But above all, they would guarantee one thing: the ‘Amen’ in church.”





12 July 2012, Berlin: “Atheist Shoes”. Can you make money from “atheism”? Yes, you can.

An interview with David Bonney.

He is enthusiastic about the softness of the leather’s surface, gently strokes it himself and lets us run our hands over the surface with great intensity; one could close one’s eyes whilst doing so.

But they were, after all, meant to be ‘atheist shoes’, which are not merely sensory but also carry symbolism. For him, the large black dot symbolises the black hole of astronomy, the immense power that signifies nothing. The small red triangle on the side of the sole stands for the ‘A’ in ‘Atheist’.

The highlight is the sole, which reads: ‘I am an atheist’. If you walk on sand, for example, you leave these tracks behind, but it’s actually meant to be subtle: you sit in a café, casually cross your legs so that the soles of your shoes are visible, and say hello...

David is always up for a bit of fun: he and his friends have already planned to make children’s shoes.

The right sole will then read: “I believe in Mummy!”, and the left: “I believe in Daddy!”



2012: For the 'Pro Children's Rights' campaign – against the forced circumcision of boys – a visual element was also needed that conveyed this issue photographically at first glance.

Evelin: "That was my job – for the agency – to design photos that served the purpose.

The art of photography now also lies in showing something that isn't actually depicted, yet which all viewers are supposed to know what is meant by it.

That is the theoretical construct. But now comes the practical requirement of finding a child, a son – this is about the injustice of male circumcision – whose parents are willing to have a photo of their son taken, shown and used, in which he is not recognisable as a person, but which his parents know is him.

I was fortunate – though this is not always possible when selecting models – to find a boy and his parents who were clear about this and had sufficient emotional distance from their knowledge to avoid any inappropriate projection.

The photograph itself is actually quite simple."



10 September 2012, Vienna: One of the staff members at the Humanist Press Service was the Austrian journalist Christoph Baumgarten, whom I approached about a collaboration when the idea arose of researching a book on church financing in Austria. He agreed, and so we drafted a concept that we were able to present to Czernin Verlag through Niko Alm's mediation and secured a publishing contract.

Christoph and I became a perfect team. When I got stuck and was on the verge of despairing over Austrian social relations, he sorted it out with his calm writing style, and when he didn't quite dare to put something into words (known in research work as 'inhibition'), I had enough distance from the subject matter to write it down myself.

When the publisher was discussing what title to give the book, we both tipped the balance in favour of 'God's Work and Our Contribution' (in reference to John Irvin's 'God's Work and the Devil's Contribution').

The press coverage was very good; even the Greens in the National Council supported us, and the print run (1,000 copies – 10,000 in Germany) sold like hot cakes. Since then, no one else has undertaken this work again.



23 October 2012, London: Interview with Andrew Copson, BHA. Networking organisations and individuals, as well as looking beyond the German ‘secular horizon’, was a priority in our work for the press service. So our path led us back to London for the big summer interview with the Chief Executive of the British Humanist Association.

He shared this concern with us: ‘When my time at the *European Humanist Federation* came to an end, I joined *the board of the International Humanist & Ethical Union*, which I am currently doing in addition to my work at the BHA. Above all, there is scope for greater networking between national organisations, not just on a continental basis. I think it could be really useful if we could strengthen the links between individual national organisations, both in the Western, developed countries – organisations that could simply serve as a starting point for other parts of the world – and organisations in the Philippines, Nigeria or South America, which are growing rapidly, and even in Eastern Europe and East Asia. There are new groups in Hong Kong, there is the *Singapore Humanist*, and a new group in Nepal. So I think it would be very good if we were to start networking these organisations more internationally together.’



13 March 2013, Berlin: PHOENIX Round Table, “Special broadcast on the occasion of the papal election ‘Habemus papam – Where is Francis leading the Church?’ Alexander Kähler discusses in the PHOENIX Round Table with: Karl Jüsten (Head of the Catholic Office Berlin), Christian Engels (Media Officer of the EKD) – Prof. Dr Anja Middelbeck-Varwick (Theologian, Free University of Berlin) – Carsten Frerk (Church critic, Humanist Press Service).”

I had already been on the PHOENIX ROUND a month earlier (“14 February: ‘Heading into the election campaign with a hangover?’”) and when the conclave began, I received a call from the editorial team asking if I was in Berlin and could come at short notice, as there was to be a special broadcast on the evening of the papal election. I agreed, and on 13 March at 7.00 pm the call came asking if I could be in the studio by 8.30 pm.

To my surprise, Karl Jüsten was there too – he hadn’t greeted me – and during the programme he paid close attention to what I said. After the programme, he stood up, came over to me, held out his hand and said: “My respect for your nuanced views.” I knew then that if I were to approach him during my planned research into lobbying, he would give me an appointment. Which is exactly what happened.



Speakers at the DHT 2013: from Antweiler to Voscherau

30 April–4 May 2013, Hamburg:

German Humanists' Day. The logo already points to a special venue: the 'Fliegende Bauten' theatre: a very large big top at Heiligengeistfeld/St. Pauli.

Konny G. Neumann made annual surplus of his "Stiftung Geistesfreiheit" (around 20,000 euros), thereby securing the basic funding.

It was a landmark event that none of the subsequent DHTs (including Regensburg and Nuremberg).



I was not only involved as a speaker, but we also documented the entire content of the five days for the hpd with photos, texts, videos and interviews.

A successful secular festival combining intellect, emotion, good food, music and cheerfulness, including evening dancing.



20–23 October 2013: Amidst the media furore surrounding the ‘flashy Bishop of Limburg’, Tebartz van Elst, TV crews were sometimes knocking on the door two or three times a day in October. And so it came to pass that on 23 October I appeared in brief clips on the Tagesschau (photo, top left) and on the heute-Journal. No one else from the ‘secular scene’ has managed that yet.

On 20 October, ‘Günter Jauch’ (filmed at the Gasometer) aired on Sundays at 9.45 pm on the topic ‘Holy Millions – why does the Church need so much money?’, and I had already been approached and booked by the editorial team the Monday before for the programme.

On Friday (18 October), the TV crew were with us to film the clip for my introduction (photo, bottom left). We were in the middle of work when the phone rang; it was my publisher on the line, who said: “The press release is out, you’re not in it!” The editor was completely baffled.

It was never clarified why my appearance on Friday had been cancelled. The editorial team apologised profusely (“internal co-ordination”), but the impression remained that Günter Jauch had personally intervened against me.



28 October 2013, Berlin: SAT1 breakfast TV.

As many people (have to) get up very early every day, the current breakfast TV programme starts at 5.30 am – in the middle of the night – and runs until 10.00 am.

Even though I'd arranged to be there by 06:30, that meant getting up at 05:15, having a quick coffee and driving straight across town to the SAT1 studio.

The 'Tebartz Weeks' also included this interview invitation, as the Bishop of Limburg's '€15,000 bathtub' was causing quite a stir.

Arriving early wasn't just necessary because of make-up, but was also due to the structure of a live broadcast, which can only be planned to a limited extent. So it was, as it were,

'in a film': first sitting around and taking a good look at everything at one's leisure. The bright background was part of the studio set.

The topic was church finances, and in particular those of Mr Tebartz-van-Elst. The secular media cannot thank this bishop enough, as he had given the problems within the Catholic Church a human face, allowing the 'tabloids' to jump on the bandwagon and exploit the principles of 'personalise!', 'Emotionalise!' and 'Scandalise!' took hold.

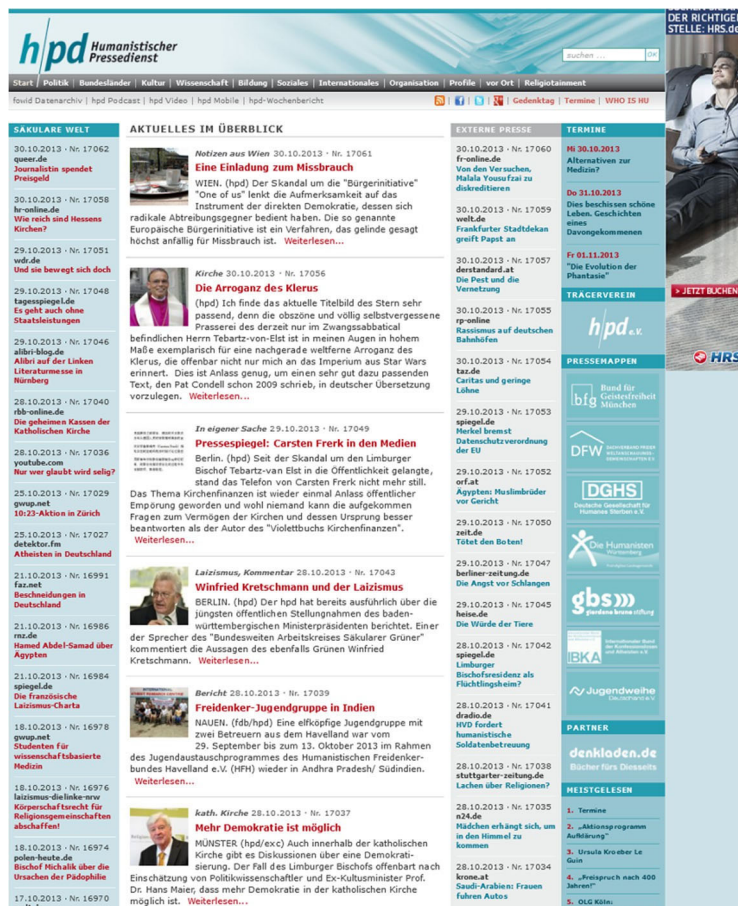


29 October 2013, ORF / ZIB2: The Limburg 'financial scandal' is making waves, and so I am interviewed on ORF1's news programme. Title: 'The "poor man" Schönborn is now among the 100 richest Austrians...

"Whilst Germany is outraged by the case of the luxury bishop Tebartz-van Elst, here in this country there is a general lack of transparency regarding the bishops' wealth. Yet as early as 2012, church assets expert Carsten Frerk revealed in his book 'God's Work and Our Contribution' that the Austrian Church possesses a conservatively estimated fortune of at least 4.5 billion euros. Estimated, because no information is provided regarding the actual ownership structure. Vienna's Cardinal Schönborn is estimated to be worth 152 million euros, including a stake in the gambling industry.

This spring, the 'Initiative against Church Privileges' sent a request to all Austrian bishops regarding their personal assets, but received no reply. Schönborn likes to portray himself as a poor man of the Church, yet in reality he ranks among the 100 richest Austrians."

Book recommendation: 'God's Work and Our Contribution: Church Financing in Austria', Czernin Verlag.



Screenshot

30 October 2013, Berlin: My ‘farewell day’ as editor-in-chief of the Humanist Press Service.

Seven years of focused development work had come to an end for me. Having started out as www.hpd-online.de, I was then able to impress a ‘domain grabber’ from the Scientologists in 2008 and secure the desired web address, resulting in a classic three-letter domain: hpd.de.

Eventually, a clear structure had developed: in the left-hand column (with red headlines) were news items from the ‘secular world’ (Europe, USA, etc.). In the wide main column (also with red headlines), featuring photos, our own reports and articles as ‘Current Affairs at a Glance’, and in the third column (green headlines) the ‘External Press’ with news about religion and the church from around the world. In the fourth column then a calendar of events and the partner organisations.

With the news from the “Secular World”, we “gateway to the secular world”, and this was one of the hpd’s unique selling points. The same applied to the “Big Summer Interviews” (Horst Herrmann, Esther Vilar, Gerhard Stremlinger, and others) at the start of the summer break. For Evelin and me, these were also the “highlights” of the editorial year.



29 November 2013, Frankfurt am Main: A report: “God’s wages were not the topic at the Saalbau Bornheim in Frankfurt am Main. The gbs Rhein-Main, in cooperation with the HVD Hessen and the Frankfurter Rundschau, had organised a panel discussion where the focus was on the nitty-gritty – our money.

The question was: What do the churches provide, and what do they cost? The panellists included author and journalist Dr Carsten Frerk, an undisputed expert on church finances (‘Violettbuch Kirchenfinanzen’), lawyer Sybille Mattfeldt-Kloth,

spokesperson for the Federal Working Group of Christians in both Green parties, and political scientist Michael Bauer, chairman of the HVD Bayern K.d.ö.R., gathered in the Main metropolis. Peter Menne (gbs Rhein-Main) and Peter Hanack (Frankfurter Rundschau) moderated the evening, which brought together a range of fascinating, unexpected viewpoints. For instance, the Protestant representatives from the Bonhoeffer Association argued more forcefully against church tax than the atheist from the HVD.

Despite all the unexpected constellations, one position was missing: church representatives from three dioceses had been invited but did not wish to take part in the discussion. Thus, a seat on the podium remained empty – in contrast to the fully occupied bishoprics’ chairs.”



30 November–1 December 2013, Giessen: EvoKids conference. “Knowledge of evolution is of central importance to the modern world view. Children should therefore learn as early as possible how the various forms of life on Earth have developed. For this reason, the ‘Evokids’ is committed to ensuring that the important subject of ‘evolution’ is taught not – as has been the case until now – only in Year 10, but already in primary school.”



At the conference in Giessen the aspects of the topic and their presentation.

Speakers at the open conference include biology educator Dittmar Graf, primatologist Volker Sommer, evolutionary biologists Thomas Junker, Ulrich Kutschera and Sabine Paul, and philosophers Eckart Voland and Michael Schmidt-Salomon.



4 December 2013, Berlin, Phoenix TV Roundtable: “Francis’s new plans – is the Pope abolishing himself?” – on the occasion of his latest encyclical entitled “*Evangelii Gaudium*”, in which he speaks of reforms in all areas and asks the faithful for courageous and creative support for his plans.

The Phoenix press release (issued the previous day) stated , among other things: “Will this be a radical cure for the Catholic Church? Alexander Kähler discusses this in the Phoenix ROUND TABLE with, among others, Auxiliary Bishop Hans-Jochen Jaschke (Archdiocese of Hamburg), Matthias Drobinski (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*) and Anne-gret Laakmann (*We Are Church*).”

My name, i.e. my participation, is not mentioned.

However, that did not surprise me at the time, as a member of the Phoenix editorial team (which is based in Cologne) had confirmed my participation to me a few days earlier and said: “We had to push it through against Mr Kähler’s wishes, though, as he did not want it. ‘You are merely a critic of the Church,’ he said, whilst we pointed out your broad expertise in the social sciences and were able to push through our decision in your favour.”

The programme is available on YouTube.



26 April 2014, Berlin: HPD editorial meeting at which the redesign of the website is presented.

There is little approval; criticism prevails. Key unique selling points from the past have been removed (including the entire “Säkulare Welt”, the “Große Sommer-interviews”, and no more “hpd videos”).

The layout follows a page structure similar to that of a smartphone, with blocks stacked on top of one another. The problem with this – in my view – was not the redesign itself, which is a matter of taste, but that – at least for me – no content strategy was discernible in it.

It is perhaps fitting, given these changes, that around two years later, no one from the editorial team of that time (pictured: Nicolai Sprekels, Corinna Gekeler, Elke Schäfer, myself, as well as (not pictured) Konny G. Neumann, Oliver Muhr and Christoph Baumgarten) is still there.

The old saying proved true: that as a former boss, one should no longer set foot in one’s old ‘company’—one becomes a harsh critic. This was then consistently reflected in the fact that in autumn 2014—without prior notice or discussion—I was simply removed from the editorial list.



19 June 2014, Oberwesel: The annual meeting of the regional group of the Giordano Bruno Foundation (GBS) at the foundation's headquarters on the Middle Rhine reached its highest attendance to date that year. As a special feature, the presence of a prominent surprise guest had also been announced.

Some had speculated as to who this special surprise guest might be, and various guesses were put forward until it became clear who it was when David Farago drove up in a Sprinter van and unloaded a gun carriage, a tablet of the law and a three-metre-tall figure, which were then carried down the stairs (with my help too): Moses with the 11th Commandment: "Thou shalt pay for thy own Kirchentag". For two days he stood at the foundation's headquarters, and one almost had the impression that he was made for this spot, visible from afar, high above the Rhine.

The GBS regional groups have been setting themselves up on their own initiative since 2008, when Alexander von der Nahmer (later "Secular Humanists – Rhine-Main Regional Group within the GBS Support Group") contacted GBS Chair Herbert Steffen and presented him with the idea of a regional group. There are now around 50 groups. Some are formed, others disband.



28 June 2014, Zurich: Major summer interview with the board of the Swiss Freethinkers' Association.

A long conversation with the board of the Freethinkers' Association. About Switzerland and its cantons, the freethinkers, the "Röstigraben" and the ongoing secularisation, including in Switzerland, and the question of what challenges this poses for freethinkers.

With Reta Caspar, Head of the Freethinkers' Association's office, Andreas Kyriacou, Central President (Science Department), Valentin Abgottspon, Vice-President (Politics Department) and Claude Fankhauser, Secretary (Humanism Department).

The Swiss Freethinkers' Association has always been a source of creative ideas in public relations, whether in bus campaigns or the 2021 referendum:

*Freethinkers' poster
2021
for the referendum on
'Marriage for All'.*





5 September 2014, Basel: A long conversation with the gbs-Switzerland team in an open and sunny workspace at Efringerstraße 25 in Basel.

Adriano Mannino, Jonas Vollmer, Micha Eichmann, Sara Savona, Kay Honegger: “Food for thought on the path towards a positive secular alternative that goes beyond the separation of church and state, in order to position ‘our’ world well. Critical-rational thinking, consumer ethics, effective use of resources, the REG project, ...”

It is still the “GBS Regional Group Switzerland”, but it will soon be renamed the “Foundation for Effective Altruism (EAS)”.





Anna Weiss,
PUBLISHER



Prof. Dr. Dr. Eric Hilgendorf,
Julius, Rechtsphilosoph



Stefan Daniel,
Astor, MGS-Palmer



Max Krassa,
Senior Lecturer



Prof. Dr. Gerhard Stremlinger,
Präsident



Prof. Dr. Ulla Wessels,
Philosophie



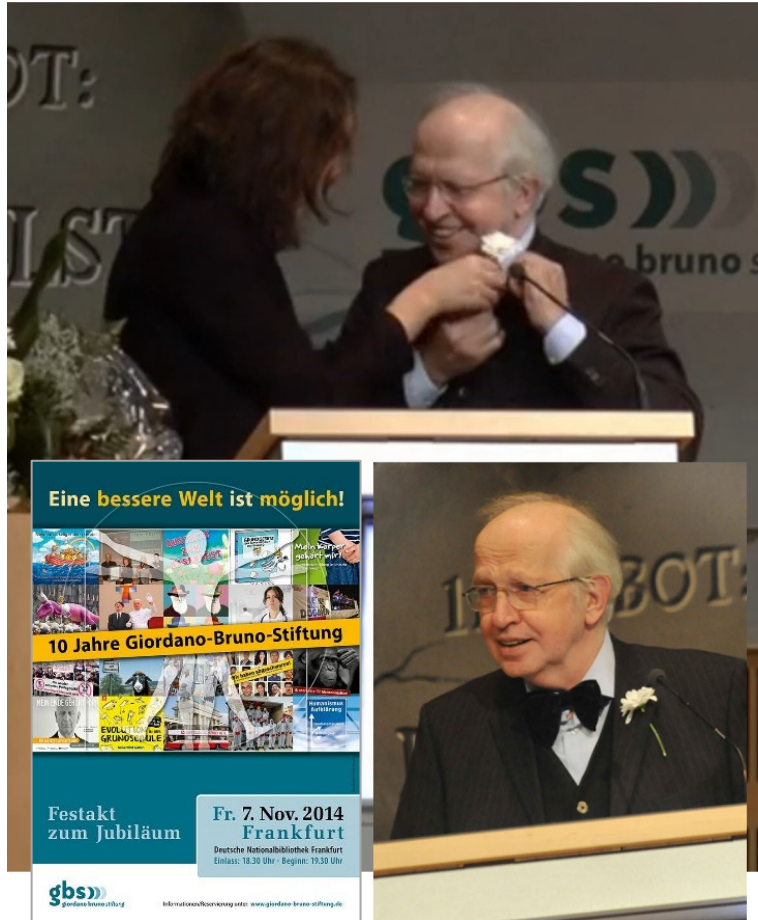
Dr. Carsten Fränk,
Publisher



Prof. Dr. Christoph Axtweller,
Göttingen



2014: For the 'My End Belongs to Me' campaign, the GBS and the agency specified two elements: firstly, black-and-white photographs, and secondly, portraits of celebrities and other people with their eyes closed. It was simple and encouraging to see how many of the celebrities approached were spontaneously willing to be photographed accordingly, and how many 'amateurs' sent in photos of themselves. Flyers, PR vehicles and exhibition panels were adorned with them.



7 November 2014, Frankfurt am Main: '10 Years of GBS' ceremony in the grand ballroom of the German National Library.

Michael and I hosted the event, and there was plenty of laughter and applause. The projects over the years, 50 university / regional groups, 6,000 supporting members.

As the highlight of the first part, Ricarda Hinz's film "History of Evolutionary Humanism" (concept by MSS) was shown, and from the bouquet of thanks, Ricarda surprisingly pinned a white flower in my buttonhole.

There is a varied programme with academic lectures and music (the "Triska" band with GBS support; members of the GBS advisory board were able to showcase their diverse talents: Assunta on vocals, Wolf on guitar, Volker Sommer on accordion, Rolf Oerter and Michael on piano).

And there was an opportunity to thank Herbert.

As I began to speak, he sank deeper and deeper into his armchair in the front row: "If Michael is the head of the foundation, then Herbert is its heart and its muscles. He is one of those quiet figures in the country who tend to stay behind the scenes and pull the strings from there. His motto is the quote on the Feuerbach: "If you want to do good, do it for the people."



From left to right: Michael Bauer, Michael Schmidt-Salomon, Rolf Schwanitz, Gerhard Czermak, Ingrid Matthäus-Maier, Carsten Frerk, Helmut Fink.

As Evelin had not been accredited as a photographer, she had to wait outside the building and then photographed the secular delegation from outside through the windows in the foyer. In the background are the photos of all previous constitutional judges.

“It was one of my most difficult shots. The bulletproof glass panes were reflective, and with two police officers standing guard, there was no way to communicate except by waving.”

24 November 2014, Karlsruhe: In the foyer of the Federal Constitutional Court.

Ingrid Matthäus-Maier (long-serving Member of the Bundestag, Chair of the Bundestag Finance Committee, KfW spokesperson) had asked the President of the Federal Constitutional Court, Prof. Andreas Voßkuhle, why the Federal Constitutional Court only spoke with bishops and not with secularists. To which Voßkuhle replied: “Write to me!”, which she did. After a good six months, the reply arrived in early November, with an appointment in November, whereupon IMM remarked: “They’ve got the year wrong!”, but it was correct: 24 November 2014. There was therefore sufficient time to select and register a secular delegation consisting of seven people, which ‘representatively’ covered various organisational and substantive aspects of the secular spectrum.

Seven constitutional judges, including President Prof. Voßkuhle, took part in the roughly two-hour discussion, and afterwards one of the judges remarked that he had not taken part in such an interesting, entertaining discussion for a long time. It was very serious and to the point – everyone present participated – but there was certainly some laughter too.



26–28 November 2014, IBKA book tour in Lower Saxony: Hanover, University of Hildesheim, bookshop in Braunschweig.

It was one of those typical reading tours where the aim was to organise several events in succession, be it a fortnight for the BfG in Bavaria – where the Diakonisches Werk then warned its members: “Attention: Carsten Frerk is on the move in Bavaria!” and (as involuntary publicity) listed the locations. This time it was the IBKA in Lower Saxony.

In Hanover, it was a lecture at the central event centre in the city centre; at the university in Hildesheim, the first secular university group had been founded, which was publicised and promoted through my lecture.

In Braunschweig, there had long been a good working relationship with the “Guten Morgen Buchladen”, which had already organised several joint events with the IBKA.

All three events were well attended and, with their respective diverse audiences, covered the entire secular spectrum.

These were the elements ‘on the ground’ with which Michael, Philipp, myself and others contributed our part to enlightenment and secularisation.



2014–2015, Berlin: Several months of research and studying the literature are now complete, and the materials for *Kirchenrepublik Deutschland* have been sorted into folders and piles corresponding to the planned chapters of the book on church lobbying. Now all that remains is to write the text.

Research requires patience, and writing the text requires calm; however, the crucial factor was the conceptualisation of the presentation and the structure of the text, ensuring that it is comprehensible and understandable to every reader.

The result was the ‘long version’, i.e. the complete text with all notes and references, running to 1,500 pages. For publication as a book, this text was then ‘condensed’ to 304 pages.

At a planning meeting in Oberwesel at the GBS’s ‘Haus Weitblick’ with Herbert, Michael, the publisher Gunnar Schedel and others, Michael then found the appropriate titles for both versions: the book became ‘Kirchenrepublik’, and the long version ‘Die Staatsflüsterer’ (The State Whisperer).

However, during the publication phase (2015), a serious rift arose between the publisher and myself over marketing strategies, which brought an end to further collaboration on the part of Alibri Verlag, and my books are no longer available.



Left: Dr Michael Vesper, President of the Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK)

18 February 2015, Münster: WDR5-aktuell (“Stadtgespräch”) programme “More Money for Prayers – Who Pays for the German Catholic Day?”. Venue: LWL Museum of Art and Culture.

A sensation had taken place in Münster. For the first time, a city council had voted by a majority against paying a cash subsidy for the German Catholic Day. And this in the staunchly Catholic city of Münster! But it would not have been possible in any other city, as the ‘killer argument’ of ‘hostility towards Catholics’ could not be used in Münster.

The crux of the matter was that the city of Münster has debts of 700 million, whilst the diocese has an income of 300 million and could/should therefore pay for the Catholic Day itself, rather than the heavily indebted city. Panel: Stefan Vesper (Secretary-General of the Central Committee of German Catholics), Klaus Winterkamp (Diocese of Münster’s Church Congress representative), Alfons Reinkemeier (Treasurer of the City of Münster), Carsten Frerk (political scientist, author, Giordano Bruno Foundation).

The hall was ‘packed to the rafters’, interest was high, for it was still a novelty that previous ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions were not only being questioned, but that Catholics were no longer following in the ‘footsteps’ of their Church.



Evelin and Eva at the 'windy' breakfast / Eva on the dune / small photo: Alibri-Verlag



12–20 September 2015, Blavand, Denmark. The research and text for 'The Church Republic of Germany' had been completed; the question now was how to turn it into a vivid presentation. So Evelin and I came up with the idea of asking Eva Creutz (graphic designer/cartoonist from the Düsseldorf Information Service) if she could spare a week to come with us to Denmark to work on a concept.



During the long morning, we concentrated on discussing and working on the topic and possible ideas for the concept; in the afternoon, we went on excursions along the coast.



10 November 2015, Berlin: Press conference on ‘The Church Republic of Germany – How great is the lobbying power of the churches?’ at the Federal Press Conference Centre.

“On the podium, alongside the author, were long-serving Member of the Bundestag Ingrid Matthäus-Maier and lawyer Dr Jacqueline Neumann, who supplemented Frerk’s remarks with political and legal assessments. The press conference was chaired by journalist Daniela Wakonigg.

A key point was that there is no legal basis for the churches’ privileged involvement in the legislative process.

Furthermore, Carsten Frerk aus pointed out that there are over 100 staff members who, through the church offices at federal and state level, maintain contact with the parliaments and the ministerial bureaucracy. Yet the churches by no means represent the weaker sections of society as their primary concern, but rather, as the second-largest employer in the republic and owners of numerous properties, have strong vested interests.

The media response was encouraging; in particular, the report *by the Evangelical Press Service (epd)* was reprinted in numerous daily newspapers. *Das Neue Deutschland* reported on it, whilst *Wirtschaftswoche*, *Mainpost* and *Junge Welt* published interviews with Carsten Frerk and Ingrid Matthäus-Maier.” (Source: *Alibri Blog*)

“When it comes to their own interests,” says Carsten Frerk, who conducted the study, “the churches are the most successful lobbyists in the country.”



Fig. Federal Constitutional Court judge with the highest Catholic order

The study was commissioned by the International Federation of Non-Religious and Atheists (IBKA) and supported by the Giordano Bruno Foundation (gbs).



30 November 2015, Hamburg: A new working group has been established within the Hamburg SPD (Social Democratic Party). This working group is intended to serve as a point of contact for party members and all interested citizens who deal with questions and issues relating to religion and society.

As a “practical test”, the planning group of the “Churches & Religious Communities Working Group” organised a panel discussion. The previous working group writes: *“One of the most persistently debated topics is the debate surrounding the churches and their finances. Here, religious beliefs have clashed for centuries. In the wake of the debate, which has flared up again due to a number of recent incidents, we have, at the suggestion of Gerhard Lein, invited the renowned critic Dr Carsten Frerk to our next event. Joining him in the discussion will be Stephan Dreyer (Caritas Director and representative of the Archdiocese to the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg) and Hans-Peter Streng (Finance Committee of the North German Synod). The discussion will be moderated by Inka Damerau.”*

“The discussion on the podium was lively, with clearly distinguishable positions, but was also repeatedly punctuated by cheerfulness and laughter.”



22 December 2015, Vienna: Lecture at the Freidenker (Freethinker). In Austria, there is a similar culture of back rooms in pubs – where the waiter is close by with a beer – as in Bavaria, and alongside our private lives, we have for years maintained a friendship with the Freidenker in Austria, to whom we also owe the research(2012) by Christoph Baumgarten and myself (“God’s Work and Our Contribution”) to the collaboration of several of the Freidenker and secularists mentioned as co-authors.

Germany and Austria share a centuries-long history of diverse power constellations, yet with common rules and traditions.



In this respect, the differences shed light on the question: “What is it, and why is it different from ‘back home’?”, often providing clarifying insights and further food for thought.

A special feature of the lecture was that we were accompanied by a well-known friend (a famous actor and writer in Austria), which impressed the freethinkers.

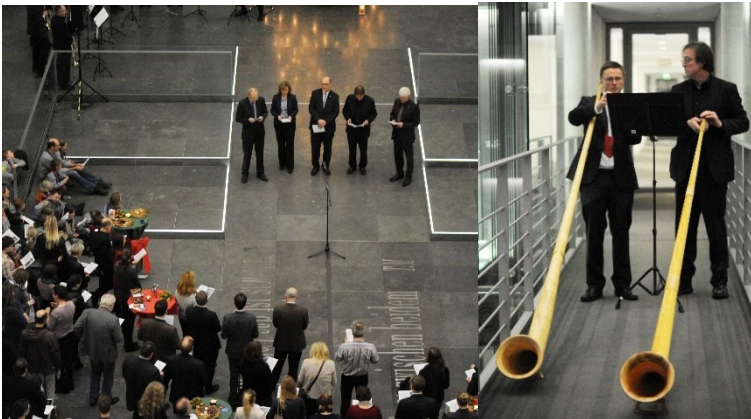


14 January 2016 – arte TV: “The Church and Money”. The author and director Michael Wech had analysed my publications, included France in his research and written a script based on it. This had taken until 2014, and in the autumn filming took place on location in Cologne and Amsterdam, and finally in Berlin as well.

For me, it was a new experience to spend four days on the road with a TV crew and, like an actor, to play a role that was myself. This involved, among other things, walking across the cathedral square, into the cathedral forum – the camera wasn’t allowed inside, it filmed from outside – or walking around in front of the Pax Bank and reciting lines.

What impressed me most was the shoot in Amsterdam, where I drove through the banking district in a car – with a camera mounted on the bonnet – and then marched through a revolving door into a holding company’s headquarters several times, until the doorman said, rather loudly and annoyed: “C’est fini!”

The film was actually due to be broadcast in late summer 2015, but was then postponed due to the refugee crisis and finally aired in January 2016: 75 minutes during prime time from 8.15 pm to 9.30 pm. (On YouTube, the programme had 124,899 views in April 2022.)



A side aspect of the filming in Berlin for “Die Kirche und das Geld” was the arte team’s plan to film and document the “Advent singing” at the Bundestag (on 18 December 2014).

“Viewers in France will be rolling on the floor with laughter when they see what kind of religious spectacle is possible and actually happens in the German Bundestag.” Evelin had obtained accreditation for the arte team at the Bundestag, and so she was able to record the video documentary of the “Advent Singing”, which then became a regular feature of my lectures on the “Church Republic of Germany”: as a vivid example of the entanglement of church and state or the ‘re-Christianisation’ of politics, the singing took place for only the seventh time.





17 February 2016, Berlin: Giordano Bruno monument. The Evolutionary Humanists Berlin-Brandenburg, as the 'responsible' regional group, endeavour to organise a (small) memorial service at Potsdamer Platz every year on the anniversary of Giordano Bruno's death. This is increasingly successful. 2016 marked the 416th anniversary of his death.

The chair of the EHBB, Helge Haufe, gives a longer speech; I, as vice-chair, give a shorter one; and Linus Heilig plays wonderfully on his accordion.



A wreath is laid at the 'foot' of the monument.
A banner for passers-by.





3–6 March 2016: ‘South-West’ reading tour.

On 3 March, one of the reading tours for ‘The Church Republic of Germany’ began, which took me all over Germany from 2015 to 2017. This one started in Freiburg (photo) and led through snow-covered Baden-Württemberg via Stuttgart (4 March), Karlsruhe (5 March) to Oberwesel (6 March).

Freiburg has always held a special significance for me. It is not just the university where I began my studies in 1967/68 and, unsuspecting (as a member of the left-liberal Humanist Students’ Union – HSU), became part of the student movement. This resulted in a short novel (266 pages): ‘Blue Flower Red, or The Story of Carl Harcott, who set out in 1967 to learn about life, or “The truth shall set you free”’. An essential text on my journey to learn how to write.

For me, Freiburg also marked the beginning of a more intensive engagement with the themes of state and church as well as religion, whereby the golden motto “THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE” above the main entrance of College Building I, which promised academic freedom, actually meant the exact opposite (John 8:32): Only those who follow Jesus will be redeemed and set free from their sins.



12 March 2016, Zurich: Lecture at the Annual General Meeting of the Swiss Freethinkers' Association, Zurich branch: "Church and State in Germany. An overview based on 15 years of research".

That was unusual for me too: a flight from Berlin to Zurich in the morning, a stopover in Zurich for a talk, and a return flight from Zurich to Berlin in the evening.

Even though conditions in Switzerland are different, the basic elements are similar. The hall was packed to the rafters, and with good wine and food, it was actually quite different from the back rooms of Bavarian country inns.

A good experience.





15 April 2016, Französisch Buchholz (north of Berlin): Lecture at the town hall on the topic: 'How great is the lobbying power of the churches?' The event was organised by a local educational association.

A reporter writes: "Dr Carsten Frerk takes the floor. Today he is primarily an author, journalist and 'lecture tourer' in a field he has thoroughly explored academically as a political scientist and sociologist with a PhD.

This time, the controversial topic led to a heated discussion. The many hard facts regarding the churches' lobbying activities were perceived by some guests as polemics. Offence was also taken at the suggestion that people acting with the best of intentions on behalf of their church played no role."





25 May 2016, Potsdam: Lecture at the ver.di trade union conference centre (between the Liebermann Villa and the House of the Wannsee Conference) on “The Church Republic of Germany – Christian Lobbying”.

Contacts with ver.di had existed since 2005 (“Caritas and Diakonie”) and over the years I had been a speaker at various events, be it training courses in Kassel or at the Ecumenical Church Congress in Berlin.

Even though the primary focus was on ‘alliance work’ with the trade unions, such conferences also led to unexpected contacts.

At this conference, a former speaker from the State Chancellery in Potsdam approached me; he was writing his final thesis on a state church-related topic, and we arranged further private meetings during which we discussed how I could ‘assist’ him. That was nothing out of the ordinary, but I haven’t kept count of how many bachelor’s, master’s theses or dissertations I was consulted on as an expert.

Left: Detail from the lecture: ‘Clothes make the man’ – Bishop Müller, once in private and once in his bishop’s robes. A photo project by photographer Herlinde Koelbl.



25–28 May 2016, Leipzig: ‘Secular Days’ on the occasion of the Protestant Church Congress in Leipzig. Programme: Dr Michael Schmidt-Salomon: “Do people today still need religion?” / Gunkl: “What else can one say about it...” / Rolf Bergmeier: “The legend of the Christian dominant culture” / Philipp Möller: “Hugo and Lisa –

from the life of an enlightened couple” / (27 May) Dr Carsten Frerk: “Church Republic of Germany. Christian lobbying – a multimedia lecture” / Dr Gerhard Czermak: “Religious law and constitutional reality” / Dr Gerhard Czermak: “Churches, Anti-Semitism and National Socialism” / Daniela Wakonigg: “11th Commandment: Thou shalt pay for thy own Church Congress! – Origins, aims and background of the Giordano Bruno Foundation’s art campaign.

Running parallel to this were the actions of the 11th Commandment: “Thou shalt pay for thy own Kirchentag.”





6 June 2016, Berlin: Red Town Hall, seat of the Senate Chancellery and the Governing Mayor, so to speak the ‘high house’ of the administration. If you can hold a conference there in the large hall on the 3rd floor, you have reached the ‘top floor’ of Berlin politics.

At this conference, “Peace and Orientation – Humanistic Contributions to an Open Society”, I gave a talk on ‘Non-denominationalism in Berlin – Attitudes, Lifestyles, Needs’, Prof. Detlef Pollack (Cluster of Excellence, University of Münster) on ‘Ideological and Religious Diversity in Germany – Problems and Opportunities for Coexistence’, and Prof. Hans Alma (University of Humanistic Studies Utrecht) on: “Relaxed Cooperation – The Social Role of Humanism in the Netherlands”.

A welcome address was given by Tim Renner (State Secretary for Culture), and during the concluding panel discussion: “Humanism as a guiding principle for pluralistic societies?”.

Speakers included Wilhelm Schmid (University of Erfurt), Martin Beck (HVD Berlin-Brandenburg) and myself (Giordano Bruno Foundation). Moderator: Catherine Newmark (Free University of Berlin, author and editor at Deutschlandradio Kultur and “Philosophie Magazin”).

Photo, from right to left: Martin Beck, Catherine Newmark and myself.



Claude Singer, Heinke Först-Montagne, Thomas Borres

13 June 2016, Berlin: Press conference at the “House of Democracy and Human Rights” on the compulsory membership of the Frenchman Thomas Borres in the Catholic Church in Germany and the compulsory payment of church taxes.

It was (once again) an opportunity to discuss the “systematic search” in Berlin for those liable for church tax. As the person affected this time was a Frenchman, we received the support of the French Free-thinkers (“Libré Pensée”, LP) through the editor-in-chief of the association’s journal “L’Idée Libre”, Claude Singer, and Heinke Först (IBKA and LP) as interpreter.

Topics included the automatic transfer of data from the Berlin tax authorities to the churches for the purpose of assessing “subjective church tax liability”, as well as the EU treaties, which preserve the cultural sovereignty of member states and thus prohibit the exchange of data between Catholic dioceses in Germany and France.

Thomas Borres, who does not consider himself a Catholic and does not live as one, was nevertheless liable for church tax in Germany because he was baptised as an infant.



14 June 2016, Bochum: Langendreer station – ‘RiR’ (Religionsfrei im Revier) with its long-standing chairman Martin Budich. My lecture ‘Church Republic’.

I not only always enjoyed travelling to Bochum – that’s where I gave my first lecture in 2002 – but it was also Martin’s calm and composed personality – a seasoned, experienced trade unionist of the ‘old school’.

Skilled and ready for a fight, he was a comrade-in-arms who was the first to show “The Life of Brian” on Good Friday, fought his way through the authorities, and organised cultural demonstrations with baked, homemade crosses: “Just one cross for everyone!”





17 September 2016, Detmold: 10th-anniversary celebration of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (KFSM). From a report: 'Then came the highlight of the evening, the theatrical production featuring video clips, animated documentaries, church and children's songs by Carsten Frerk on the theme of

'Church Republic of Germany'. Despite the light-hearted nature of the presentation, it was enough to really give you the creeps. Everyone should listen to it; it's too complex to summarise the content here. In any case, there was real fire in the air."

Well, in any case, there was pasta for the 'believers' and those who wanted to become believers.



10 JAHRE
KIRCHE DES FLIEGENDEN SPAGHETTI-MONSTERS DEUTSCHLAND E.V.

SAMSTAG, 17. SEPTEMBER • 19:30 UHR
JUGENDHERBERGE DETMOLD • SCHIRMANNSTR. 49

KIRCHENREPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND

VORTRAG VON DR. CARSTEN FRERK
 MIT SZENISCHER INSZENIERUNG

„Als Fazit kommt Carsten Frerk zu der Einschätzung, dass die Kirchen – wo es um ihre übrigen Belange als Organisationen geht – die erfolgreichsten Lobbyisten der Republik sind.“

EINTRITT: 8 EUR • KARTENVORVERKAUF:
BUCHHANDLUNG KAFKA & CO. • KRUMME STR. 8 • DETMOLD

VERANSTALTER: RUPHO E.V. • RÜDIGER WEGE • SCHLITZENFELDE 9 • D-37267 TEMPELM • PASTORALEN 61





1–3 November 2016, Markersdorf: ‘Joint conference of the district pastors’ conventions of the SELK’s Eastern Region on the general theme of “Church and State” at St Wenzelus-Haus, the educational centre of the Diocese of Görlitz. “The keynote speaker was Dr Carsten Frerk (Berlin), who spoke on ‘Facets of the relationship between state and churches in Germany’.”

That was one of the most unusual invitations I have ever received. The Provost of the SELK’s Eastern Synod had agreed with me that we were both in favour of the separation of church and state and that he needed my help, as younger pastors were increasingly interested in the state collecting church tax, since donations were too uncertain for them. He would view a lecture by me as support for his position.

The SELK (Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church) is something like the ‘Old Evangelicals’ within the EKD, who are organised along strictly male-patriarchal lines and wear Roman collars (collare).

Around 40 pastors were present, and listening to a trained male choir singing hymns in the evening is quite impressive.

I don’t know whether my talk had the desired effect, but the bishop of the SELK had made a special trip to attend.



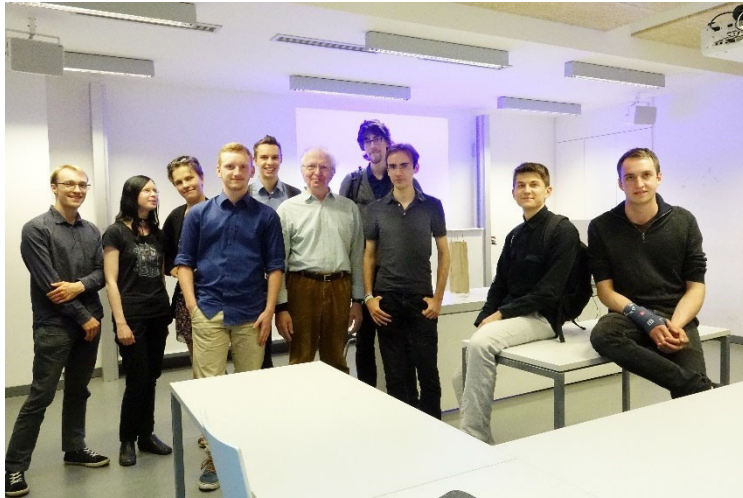
4 November 2016, Dresden: Kultur-Rathaus. Lecture at the invitation of the DIE LINKE parliamentary group in the Saxon State Parliament: 'The Churches and the Health Funds.' The large room was packed to the rafters and people had to stand outside the hall on the stairs.

Although I normally have no connection with the party DIE LINKE any connection to the party, it seemed sensible to me to support them in their work critical of the churches in Saxony, as both the CDU and the SPD have the bishop sitting on their laps, so to speak.



My contact person was the Member of the State Parliament André Schollbach, who regularly inquiries regarding church funding and supported me in my work.

And a packed hall and people standing outside for listening was impressive for me – it's not something I get to experience every day.



7 June 2017, Berlin: Lecture to the Secular University Group at Humboldt University in Berlin on 'The Church Republic of Germany'.

One of my mottos is, among other things, "Quantity does not replace quality". I preferred having nine committed students in the audience – followed by an engaging discussion from which I, in turn, learnt something – to having 50 secularists in the audience who then went home rather silently.

In this situation, too, it was a reaffirmation of the commitment of the next generation. The organiser of the event at the HUB was Tobias Wolfram, whom I had met in 2014 on an "atheist forest walk" organised by the Evolutionary Humanists Berlin-Brandenburg, together with the forester Peter Linke from Wittstock-Ostprignitz.

The forester then organised the Evolution Trail in Kyritz in 2020. This is how 'circles' connect with one another.





21 June 2017, Berlin: The Evolutionary Humanists Berlin-Brandenburg (EHBB) stand on the HVD's event mile to mark World Humanist Day. The EHBB board (from left to right: Christine Nickchen, myself and Hellge Haufe) wait to see who and what is coming.

The Humanist Association of Germany had succeeded in getting the 'World Humanist Day' (21 June, summer solstice) recognised as a public holiday in Berlin, so that schoolchildren could stay away from lessons without it being marked as an absence in the class register or on their school reports. To mark the occasion, there had to be some sort of "celebration", and since then there has been an official public holiday with events: In 2017 and 2018, on 21 June, in a cordoned-off section of Wallstraße, which was decorated with balloons, banners and flags, there were a variety of information stands on all the activities offered by the HVD and affiliated organisations.

We had brought along our information materials on the Luther Year, and at the front on the table, on the poster reading 'What Hitler did, Luther advised' (Karl Jaspers), stood my wooden vendor's tray, the straps of which were looped around my neck so that leaflets could be handed out if necessary without needing a fixed stand.



21–24 September 2017, Paris: 7th Congress of the International Association of Freethought (IAFT), where I gave a talk on the relationship between ‘State and Church in Germany’ (for which printed translations into French, English and Spanish were available).

Heinke Först-Montagne approached me about this, supported by Claude Singer.

It was a particular honour for me to be appointed as an individual member of the IAFT’s International Advisory Board.



Heinke Först-Montagne and Claude Singer



30 October 2017, Berlin: It was the Year of Luther and David Farago brought along a Luther figure: 'The Naked Truth about Martin Luther' was certainly an 'eye-catcher', but had the technical drawback that four people were needed to lift the parts out of the van and assemble them into the complete figure.

I had thought that wouldn't be a problem in Berlin; after all, there is a GBS regional group in every district...

The circular yielded a single reply: from Robbi Maier – a start-up entrepreneur with 240 employees, married with three children – who then arrived at the agreed time at the Mercedes-Benz Arena, where Dr Hirschhausen was hosting a grand "Luther Pop Oratorio" (with 4,000 singers) that evening to mark the Luther Year.

Without Robbi and me, who certainly had other things to do, David would have had to stay in the Sprinter with his Luther.

Two police officers helped dismantle the figure.

From left to right: Robbi Maier, me, the Luther figure, David Farago, Gisa Bodenstein – after the set-up work was complete: the figure stands on the mobile pedestal.



July and August 2018 took me on a tour of the 'Church Republic of Germany' – with corresponding lectures in Constance, Bremen, Göttingen...





28 August 2018, Ulm: In February/March, my phone rang and a woman introduced herself as the managing director of the Ulm Marketing Club.

One of her members (D.F.) had been urging her for three years to invite me to give a talk. She wanted to clarify this: "What topic can you suggest that would be of interest to our members?" I thought for a moment and said: "Something on the marketing of churches? After all, the Roman Church didn't originate from a temple, but from a market hall, a basilica." "Oh!" And so we chatted for three quarters of an hour, laughing a lot, and she then said: "I'll book you and, if necessary, take the responsibility for it myself."

That was quite a challenge – giving a talk on this subject to experts – but the more I immersed myself in PR literature, the more convincing it became that the entire history of the Church could be described and analysed using marketing terminology. That's how one of my best talks came about: "The Church – The Best Business Idea of All Time!"

And one member of the audience, the head of marketing at a medium-sized company, remarked afterwards: "If I hadn't already left the church two years ago, I would have done so tomorrow!"



October 2018, Berlin: Secular Refugee Aid Berlin e.V. (ARR – Atheist Refugee Relief) – Photo opportunity at Gendarmenmarkt.

Refugee Aid Berlin was founded in May 2018... Refugee work is a matter for the federal states, so we had to



organise formally at the state level in order to engage in dialogue with politicians. This was not readily accepted, but without start-up funding and powerful donors, we were able to do what we considered necessary.

Evelin was the chairperson, and further ‘comrades-in-arms’ joined from the EHBB circle, as well as refugees themselves (Harem, Shurug & Ziad, among others).



(Together with Peder Iblher) we produced, but we were not allowed to distribute them, as the social services feared this might cause unrest in the accommodation centres. We were able to successfully (and more) asylum seekers, and it turned out that the five who caused major problems required just as much support as all the others put together. In the work of refugee , which is certainly time-consuming, complicated and even frustrating, you are considered ‘burnt out’ after three years.



12 November 2018, Berlin: As part of 'Secular Human Rights Week', an 'information evening' was held: 'The world is our country' – Secular Refugee Aid Berlin introduces itself. The venue was the large hall at the 'House of Democracy and Human Rights' in Berlin-Mitte. "An evening with people with and without a migrant background, featuring Arabic food and a glass of good wine." Among those attending the well-attended event were Mina Ahadi, Necla Kelek, MSS and Elke.

A press conference on the subject was held that morning at the Federal Press Conference Centre.





31 December 2018: The New Year's Eve broadcast by the church affairs department of Deutschlandfunk. The head of the church editorial team at Deutschlandfunk is Dr Christiane Florin. A committed lobbyist for the interests of the Catholic Church, I thought. After all, she was the main presenter at the large church lobby conference in June 2014 in the plenary chamber of the North Rhine-Westphalia state parliament.

In the summer, I had written an email to her – someone I have never met in person – which I very rarely do, stating that a radio report lacked substance because the empirical evidence was very scant. She replied, accepted my objections and asked if she could interview me sometime. I declined. I didn't want to be the 'secular fig leaf' on her church radio station.

She didn't let it go, kept asking, offered me a 'big chat' – i.e. 55 minutes – and I agreed, on the understanding that we would be talking about a sort of year in review. Mid-December. By then, unbeknownst to me, she was so angry about the Bishops' Conference's failure to comment on sexual abuse that she offered me

31 December as the broadcast date: the end-of-year show, which I – as an 'evidence-based sceptic' – accepted.



Carsten Frerk, fotografiert von Raelin Perle

2 April 2019: A short, concise article of mine appears in the Swiss magazine 'Der Monat': in the dossier 'State and Church'.



The editor-in-chief had approached me about an article, 15,000 - 17,000 characters. Fee: Unfortunately no money, but two bottles of wine . Why not? Intellectuals drink.

Evelin and I had – in February for her birthday – driven to St Peter-Ording on the North Sea coast shortly afterwards; it was peaceful and we had time. I sat down and wrote the first draft of the article over the course of two days. Back home, I hardly needed to change or add anything when I checked it over. So: 'Off to the post office'.

The editorial team was pleasantly surprised – it even included data on the situation in Switzerland.

The payment soon arrived in Berlin: a whole crate of very good, dry white wine. That was a lovely surprise.



6 April 2019, Berlin: To mark the launch of the 2019 bus campaign – which forms part of the overall concept of ‘100 Years Is Enough’: since 1919, state subsidies are to be phased out, i.e. discontinued – there was a performance by the ‘GBS Quintet’ in the Meistersaal in Berlin-Mitte. Philipp Möller in conversation with Ingrid Matthäus-Maier, Jacqueline Neumann, Michael and me on the most essential aspects of the state-church relationship in Germany:

“Who owns the state? – On the disregard for the principle of ideological neutrality.”

There was considerable interest in the topic and the very large “Meistersaal” was sold out.





May 2019: Bus campaign II, on “CHURCH STATE? NO, THANKS.”

The buses were to be wrapped in graphics; posters, postcards and flyers needed designs, so Evelin was commissioned to take photographs of her choice to match the slogans Peder Ibher had formulated: Niko Alm (Vienna, National Council), Kholoud Bariedah (ex-Muslim), Johanna Goldschmidt and her husband Philipp Möller (spokesperson for the 2009 bus campaign and “Godless and happy!”).





8 May 2019, Hamburg: Day 5 of the bus campaign.

Hpd report (Gisa Bodenstein): “The Hamburg weather lived up to its reputation: it soon began to rain, which slowed down the otherwise brisk flow of passers-by somewhat. Carsten Frerk, the ‘Maestro of Church Finances’, as announced by Michael Schmidt-Salomon, the spokesperson for the board of the Giordano Bruno Foundation (gbs), had himself lived in Hamburg for many years and led the city tour through the harbour and the Speicherstadt, past the fish market and the Elbphilharmonie. (...)”

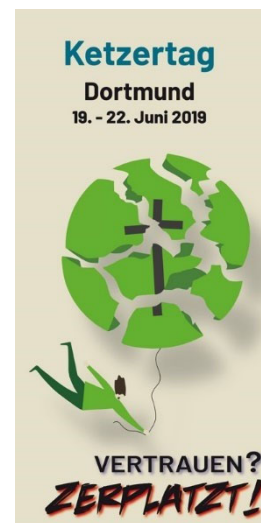


Another story concerned the establishment of the Archdiocese of Hamburg in 1994: the Church enquired about the situation regarding state subsidies. Henning Voscherau, then Lord Mayor of the Han-

seatic City, is said to have replied: “Hamburg has not voluntarily paid money to third parties for 800 years, and that is how it should remain.” In the evening, Frerk discussed matters at the Altona Museum – in the beautiful figurehead hall – with the philosopher Michael Schmidt-Salomon and Karl-Heinrich Melzer, the provost of the Lutheran Church District of Hamburg-West and South Holstein.”



19–22 June 2019, Dortmund: On the occasion of the Protestant Church Congress in Dortmund, I had been asked whether I would be available as a speaker at the RFZ (“Religion-Free Zone”) there. I agreed, as the wish was to bring together the “secular sextet” (Ingrid Matthäus-Maier, Jacqueline Neumann, Michael Schmidt-Salomon, Jacques Tilly, Philipp Möller and myself).



I then received confirmation and the planned programme. This led to a rather heated dispute, as I refused to take part in a “day of heresy”.

‘Heretic’ is a religious-political term used by Catholicism, and I object when (above all) Catholic renegades—that is, apostate former Catholics—use (or seek to use) secular forums to vent their grievances against the Church.

In the end, wanting to avoid further escalation, I gave in, saying ironically: “The wiser one gives in!”

Photo below: Daniela Wakonigg



5–8 September 2019, Hamburg: German Humanist Day



Changes in the secular scene are also evident when comparing the Humanist Days in Hamburg: in 2013 in the theatre tent of the 'Fliegende Bauten' and now at one of the Hanseatic city's most prestigious venues – the Haus der Patriotischen Gesellschaft – where all the rooms were 'in use' simultaneously.

Everyone of note – both individuals and organisations – had travelled to this major national event, organised by Konny G. Neumann (Stiftung Geistesfreiheit) and KORSO: Ingrid Matthäus-Maier, Michael Schmidt-Salomon, Mina Ahadi, Florian Chefai, and many more. Welcoming addresses were given by the Lord Mayor of Hamburg and the President of the City Parliament.

I myself was there with two presentations. The first was on the topic 'State funding for the churches: justified?', to which I remarked that there was a short and a long version of my talk; the short one being: 'No!' The second topic was "Secular Refugee Aid – Why It Is Necessary", whereby Konny – who is focused on peaceful cooperation – had simply brought the two secular refugee aid organisations (Cologne and Berlin) together 'around one table'.



21 October 2019, Freiburg: My last lecture (outside Berlin) “The Church: the best business idea of all time.”

It was to be a conscious and personal decision as to when I would stop ‘travelling around’, and this lecture at the University of Freiburg seemed to me to be the right place and time. In the winter semester of 1967/68, some 50 years ago, I had begun my studies here – also in this large lecture theatre (KG I – Room 1098) – and it was four days before my 74th birthday: a circle of life had thus come full circle for me and it was time to step back.

From 2002 to 2019, that is, over 17 years, I gave a total of 226 lectures. That adds up to quite a few.

However, it was not just my own ‘weariness’ as a traveller; it was also the fact that – with the exception of a few organisers (in Düsseldorf, Mainz, Frankfurt, Karlsruhe, Freiburg) – there was, in my view, a growing indifference, whether in the promotional material leading up to the event or on the day itself. And I didn’t want to put myself through that any longer.

This is perhaps also reflected in the fact that I have not managed to find a successor for my work. But what is not yet may still come to be.



15 November 2019, Falkensee near Berlin: Berlin and the surrounding area were not affected by the 'no more travelling around' policy. At the EHBB there were two men who actually came from Falkensee on the outskirts of Berlin, and so the question arose as to whether and why they shouldn't start their own group. I was happy to support this with two talks: the Brandenburg/Falkensee regional group "prouknall".

At the Christmas market, there was a colourful stall featuring baked goods from the popular Darwin-Fischen and Werner, one of the two chairmen, wore a T-shirt emblazoned with "Godlessly happy!" on his broad chest at every opportunity. This got on the Christian mayor's nerves to such an extent that he had it conveyed that the grants for the community centre "B84" (which was also used for secular refugee aid) might soon be cut, and most members of the regional group 'gave in'.

This showed that the 'tough nuts to crack' in the 'Secular Decade' are not to be found in Berlin, but in the rural districts and small towns.

Left: Werner Kübler and Human Mirafatti from 'prouknall e.V.'



25 August 2020, Berlin: Memorial service and funeral of Volker Panzer.

Volker Panzer, a long-serving ZDF journalist (most recently with the 'ZDF Nachtstudio' – 430 episodes featuring 2,500 guests), had become a member of the GBS Advisory Board, a wise and "ideal ambassador of a gentle, Epicurean humanism". After he passed away on 13 August 2020, the GBS asked me, as a representative of the foundation, to say a few words at the funeral service. When I contacted his widow, she asked me if I could take on the task of organising the funeral service at Heerstraße Cemetery. That is how it came to pass.

Volker had expressed only a few, but precise, wishes: his cowboy boots were to be buried with him, and it should be colourful and cheerful – after all, one only dies once.

The funeral procession passed the grave of Vico von Bülow ("Loriot") and the coffin was laid to rest on the slope of the early river valley. The music "Heute hier, morgen dort" by Hannes Wader played in the background.





8 October 2020, Berlin: “Speakers in rain or wind – Carsten Frerk and that’s ‘geschwind’!” What can be done in the age of Covid to ensure club life doesn’t become entirely virtual? A socially distanced gathering outdoors, organised by location scout Andreas May. And so it was: an invitation to a talk: “Islamic Lobbying”.

The topic came about by chance. A friend at “Secular Refugee Aid Berlin” asked after a fundraising meeting for smaller NGOs at the House of Resources: “Do you have any idea who Inssan e.V. is?” Two of the participants – wearing headscarves – were there on behalf of the organisation.

I did some research and then spent the next two months working on a ‘policy analysis’ of how organisations of political Islam make their way through the institutions, with what (Christian) support and backing, right up to the ministerial level where they secure public funding. This resulted in a comprehensive study, which I had now turned into a lecture, complete with numerous PowerPoint slides to visually illustrate structures, personnel connections, etc. It worked as a way of bringing the topic to life for those interested.



2 October 2021 / Templin: To mark the 15th anniversary of the 'Pastafarians', I gave a talk in the ballroom of the Historic Town Hall on

"Islamic Lobbyism – The Path of Political Islam Organisations through the Institutions." A topical topic that had once again broadened the scope of religious issues.



To mark the celebrations, many "Pastafarians" from all over Germany had donned their finest "pirate outfits", and it was a suitably colourful

sight, whether wearing a tricorn hat or a pasta strainer.

There is an impressive seriousness with which these grown men and women pursue their religious parody.

At times, however, I did get the impression that the 'pasta masses' had actually become a religion in their own right.

But there is the realisation that a good travesty is better than the original.

For me, this lecture meant several things, including that the topic of 'political Islam' had, on the one hand, gained nationwide acceptance, but on the other hand, that outside of committed organisations, there was no objective interest in it.



My idea of setting up a website (www.politischer-islam.de) to provide condensed graphics and information for download

... (r) not been possible to realise. All experts (including the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution) have – upon enquiry – shown no interest.

Neue Hochrechnung

Kirchenmitglieder sind nur noch eine Minderheit in Deutschland

Über Jahrhunderte war es in Deutschland normal, einer der großen Kirchen anzugehören. Jetzt ist der Anteil der Kirchenmitglieder auf unter 50 Prozent gefallen. Forscher sprechen von einer »historischen Zäsur«.

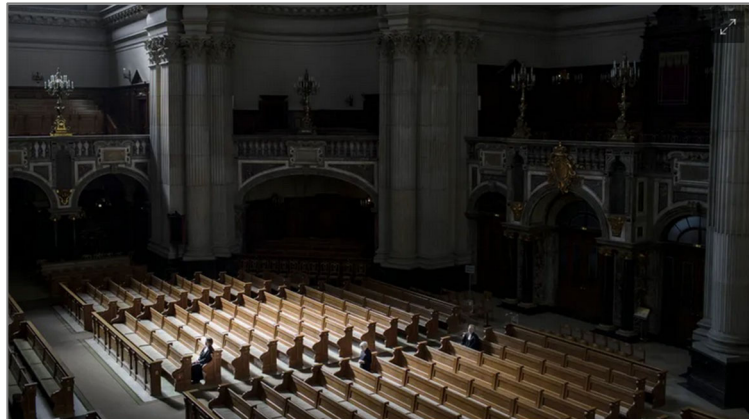
12.04.2022, 15.09 Uhr



Der Kölner Dom: Die Volkskirchen verlieren Mitglieder Foto: Krystof Kriz / Imago Images

19 August 2022 The figures from the Bishops' Conference had already hinted at this in April 2022, and once the EKD announced its figures, it was 'official': "What had been foreseeable since the end of 2021 and was forecast once again before Easter 2022 has now, so to speak,

'Officially' confirmed: the proportion of church members has fallen below the 50 per cent mark of the population: it stands at 49.7 per cent. This is a historic turning point, as for the first time in the history of the church in Germany, the majority of the population is no longer a church member." (fowid, 27 June 2022)



Kirchenbesucher: Der Westen folgt dem Osten Foto: Emile Ducke / The New York Times / Redux / laif

Kirchen in der Krise

Land der Gottlosen

Erstmals sind kirchlich gebundene Christen in Deutschland in der Minderheit. Experten sprechen von einem »Kipppunkt«. Warum die Bundesregierung diesen Trend noch verstärken könnte.

Von **Hilmar Schmundt**
19.08.2022, 13.00 Uhr • aus **DER SPIEGEL 34/2022**

"Leaving the church is like hair loss: what's gone is gone." (Carsten Freerk)



5 October 2022, Düsseldorf: Düsseldorf Information Service: "To everyone who has, more will be given, so that they will have an abundance ..." (Matthew 25:29) Facts and clarifications regarding the Church Congress Republic of Germany.

In June 2022, Düsseldorf City Council decided to subsidise the major religious event of the Church Congress with at least 5.8 million euros.

Many people are asking why the Protestant Church, which is worth billions, does not finance its own Kirchentag. Politicians and church officials regularly claim that Kirchentags are a boon for the city. They cite "revenue in the millions" generated by visitors and emphasise the major socio-political relevance for citizens of all world views. Terms such as "regional economic effects of the Kirchentag", "value creation" and "indirect returns" are bandied about.

This lecture examines the claim made by the Church Congress (and the Düsseldorf city administration) that it is a major event of socio-political relevance. The findings of several studies on the participants, their motivation, preferences, age groups, voting preferences, etc., paint a nuanced picture of what the Church Congresses are 'good' for and what they are not.



The production company had forbidden any photography of Mario Barth.

20 October 2022, Berlin: 'Mario Barth uncovers'.

When the production company rang, I didn't know what to make of it at first: an interview with Mario Barth, the familiar face of 'lowbrow comedy', who nevertheless filled the Olympic Stadium with it.

I allowed myself to be persuaded that this series was different, serious – after all, the president of the Taxpayers' Association (Reiner Holznagel) was one of the co-organisers. Topic: State subsidies/waste of taxpayers' money.

During the interview, I got to know a matter-of-fact, competent Mario Barth, who, after the first question, no longer followed his written 'briefing' and spoke to me factually, with interest and freely.



I assume that the programme (RTL+) and the interview reached more people and (for the first time) heard something on the subject of state benefits than on all the other 'our' channels.

The criticism – that one should not speak to a man like Mario Barth, and neither should I – was not long in coming.



7–8 April 2023, Paris: The International Association of Freethinkers (*Association Internationale de Libre Pensée, AILP*) had invited participants to an international conference in Paris. (I am a member of the AILP’s International Advisory Board.) Topic: the abolition of concordats worldwide. I gave a talk on the Reich Concordat of 1933, which is still in force.

Two aspects were particularly important to me in this regard : Firstly, I had chosen the motto for my lecture: “The end justifies the means.” When translating it into French and English , it turned out that the term ‘sanctifies’ cannot be translated.

Secondly: the average age of the participants was around 70. The explanation given for this was that younger people can no longer be interested in the subject of concordats.



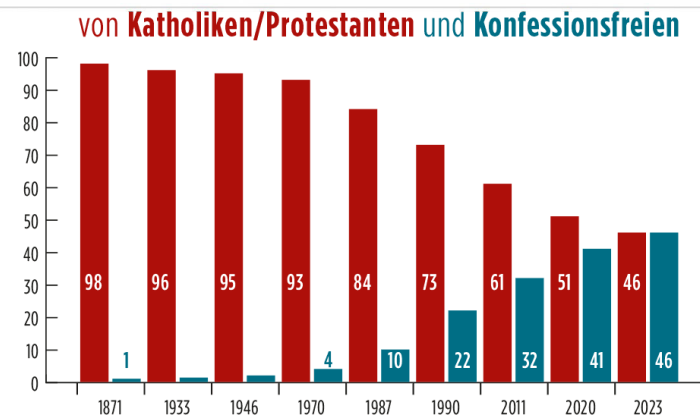
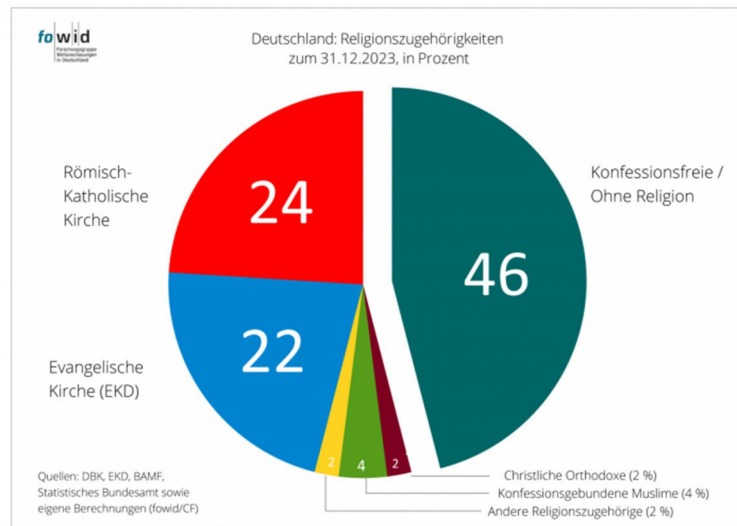


23 April 2023, Oberwesel: Memorial service for Herbert Steffen. Herbert, who had died on 18 November 2022, had stipulated that there should be no funeral service for him, but rather a memorial service at a later date, which is what took place.

“Among those taking part are (in alphabetical order): Mina Ahadi (Central Council of Ex-Muslims), Carsten Frerk (social researcher, head of the Research Group on Worldviews in Germany), Colin Goldner (psychologist, Great Ape Project), Ricarda Hinz (filmmaker, Düsseldorf Enlightenment Service), Mathias Jung (philosopher, gbs Advisory Board), Ingrid Matthäus-Maier (former SPD finance expert, Institute for Worldview Law), Philipp Möller (author, Central Council of Non-Denominationalists), Rolf Oerter (developmental psychologist, gbs Advisory Board), Michael Schmidt-Salomon (philosopher, gbs co-founder and chairman), Rolf Schwanitz (former Minister of State, ifw Advisory Board), Volker Sommer (primatologist, evolutionary biologist, GAP), Jacques Tilly (Wagenbauer, gbs Advisory Board), Eckart Vo-



-land (sociobiologist, philosopher of nature, Evokids project) as well as Ulla Wessels (philosopher, Deputy Chair of the gbs and member of the Advisory Board of the Hans-Albert Institute).”



28 August 2024: A report: “For the first time, at the end of 2023, people with no religious affiliation accounted for 46 per cent of the population in German history, a proportion equal to that of Catholics and Protestants combined (24+22 per cent). At the same time, only 5 per cent of the population still regularly attends a church, synagogue or mosque. This is evident from the data presented today by the ‘Research Group on Worldviews in Germany’ (fowid).

Even fowid director Carsten Frerk was surprised by the study’s findings, as he had assumed, based on the trend of recent years, that the proportion of the population without religious affiliation would be ‘only’ 45 per cent by the end of 2023. The fact that this proportion actually stands at 46 per cent is less to do with the relatively stable decline in membership of the two major churches than with a more precise analysis of the proportion of the population belonging to smaller religious communities.”

Although for the statistician this is a continuous trend, there are nevertheless these ‘special’ figures and years: 2022 – 49.7 per cent church members, i.e. less than half the population; 2024 – ‘tie’; and, predictably, a non-denominational majority in Germany by 2028. I expect to live to see that.



23 November 2024: Philosophical Salon, Cologne.

I was unable to stick to my intention of giving lectures only in Berlin and the surrounding area when I received a friendly invitation from the 'Philosophical Salon, Cologne' (Sabine Marx). It was not a lecture either, but an evening of discussion between myself and the other participants, on the topic: 'Father State and Mother Church'.

Three aspects stood out for me in particular: as a guest expert, I 'sat enthroned' on a raised platform in a large wing chair, a 'classic' grandfather's armchair, but so did all the other speakers.

I had been unaware until then that there are private, committed salons for political discussion in Germany – and the list of topics and speakers is impressive and extensive.

We had also agreed that there would be no audio or video recordings of the evening, in order to allow for a 'free discussion' (!) on the topic. In that respect, the evening – from a media perspective – did not take place at all.

It was an exciting evening with discussions that were challenging even for me, which made it clear to me just how much thought people in Germany give to the subject of 'church and state'.



Screenshot

15 February/16 July/31 December 2025/YouTube: It was no coincidence that the interview for a video featuring short segments by me on the wealth of the churches in Germany took place in a church. The title was admittedly sensationalist:

“The Inconceivable Wealth of the Churches”, but the commentary as a whole was factual and informative.

Published on 16 July, the video had already been viewed 2,612,785 times by 14 November, and by the end of December 2,719,109 views.

During the recording on 15 February, it was bitterly cold in Berlin and the team had found a church for the recording after a long search. We spent around three hours in this rented church at minus 15 degrees.

The atmosphere was friendly; I joked that hopefully no one would notice my red nose (from the cold).

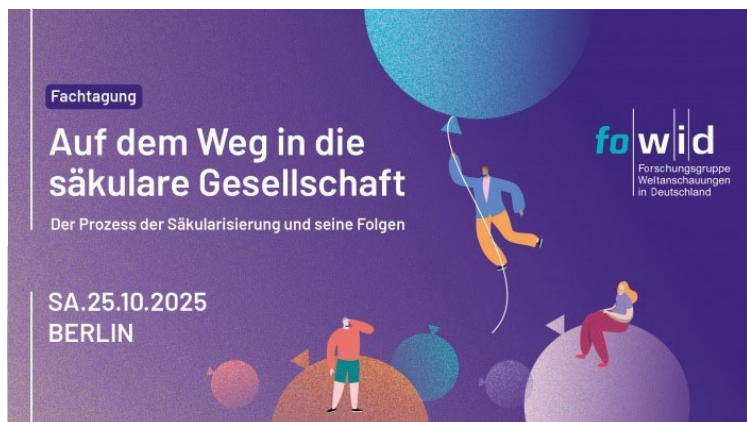
For me, there was a little bit of extra fun, because my granddaughter Alexandra called me in between and said quite proudly that a friend had called her and pointed out the video, remarking: “This is the first time I’ve seen your surname on the internet.” In that sense, one of the 2.7 million views is from Alexandra.

Let no one say that you can’t reach young people, even on difficult topics.



12 September 2025, Berlin: *The Working Group on Political Islam* (AKPolis) held an event at the Willy Brandt House in Berlin on “The Muslim Brotherhood (MB) – Agenda, Structures and Political Responses”. The aim was to inform SPD elected representatives and officials, experts and the media about so-called Frérism and its networks in Europe. The keynote address was delivered by Dr Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, author of the French non-fiction bestseller “Caliphate by Design”, which was supplemented by contributions from other renowned experts.

My brief contribution outlined findings and blind *spots regarding the CLAIM alliance*. Particularly striking was the involvement of a very small circle of individuals, the best-known member of which is Sawsan Chebli, a former political official (SPD) and State Secretary in the Berlin Senate Chancellery. In particular, a visit by activists to organisations close to the Muslim Brotherhood in the USA allowed a clear link to the MB to be established. One of *CLAIM’s* aims, as I emphasised using several examples, is to establish “anti-Muslim racism” as a battle cry to gain interpretative authority. And all of this is funded by taxpayers’ money. This could and should be stopped.



*Matthias Krause überreicht eine reale „fowid-Torte“
Foto: Ricarda Hinz*

25 October 2025, Berlin: To mark 20 years of fowid, conference “On the Way to a Secular Society”.

Moderated by Ulla Wessels and Michael Schmidt-Salomon, speakers included Detlef Pollack, Edgar Wunder, Christoph Antweiler, Ansgar Hense, Jaqueline Neumann and myself. On the podium were Ingrid Matthäus-Meier, Anne Gideon, Ali Toprak and Philipp Möller.



A special surprise was the real “fowid cake”, which Matthias Krause (who had travelled from Singapore) had specially commissioned.



Screenshots: ZDF

19 December 2025, ZDF / WISO / Deals. The view that ‘church issues’ are no longer of interest to younger people is refuted by recent interviews, with which the national TV media are seeking to reach younger viewers in particular. Although the specific topic was ‘What is happening with church tax?’, the journalist (Kaja Adchayan) was primarily interested in the churches’ assets. As she was unable to cover this sufficiently in this programme, there will likely soon be another episode of WISO/Deals on this subject.

A funny side note was that the camera crew had first walked through the building and all the rooms, and viewers now got a very vivid impression of the fact that it is not so easy to find the right and, secondly, that we live and work in large spaces.





16 January 2026: Bundestag, parliamentary group level, SPD, 3-S008.

This is the first time that the 'AK Secularity and Humanism in the SPD' has been able to organise a conference in German Parliament in the Reichstag building. The topics are 1. "Abolition of state subsidies to the churches – is there a new push to implement the mandate of the Basic Law?" and 2. "Inter-religious dialogue as a tool for stabilising social cohesion – what contribution can secular and humanist organisations make?"

I have been invited as a speaker on the topic of "state subsidies", together with Hannes Haupt (SPD) and Konstantin von Notz (MP, Alliance 90/The Greens, EKD). Three other Members of the Bundestag are present. It is my aim to bring the 1924 draft bill, which I have copied and distributed to all 65 conference participants, back into the public consciousness. This draft contains everything that we as secularists would – or should – formulate today. However, when I look at the reactions of the MPs, I have my doubts as to whether the information is getting through to them at all.

Gerhard Lein (from Hamburg, my age) then asks me: "What do you think: will we live to see these 'state benefits' come to an end?"

I only need a moment to reflect before replying: "No." We'll see.



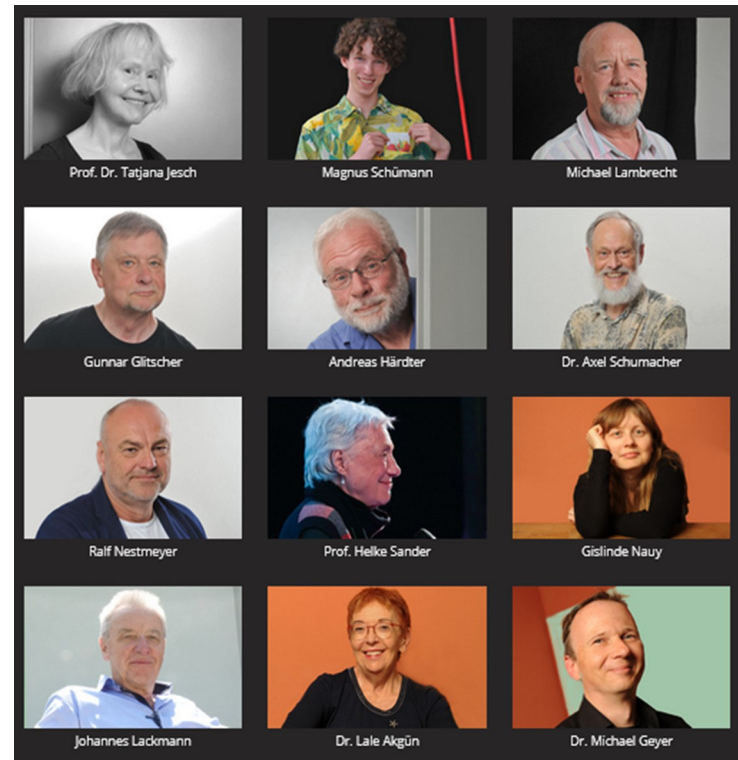
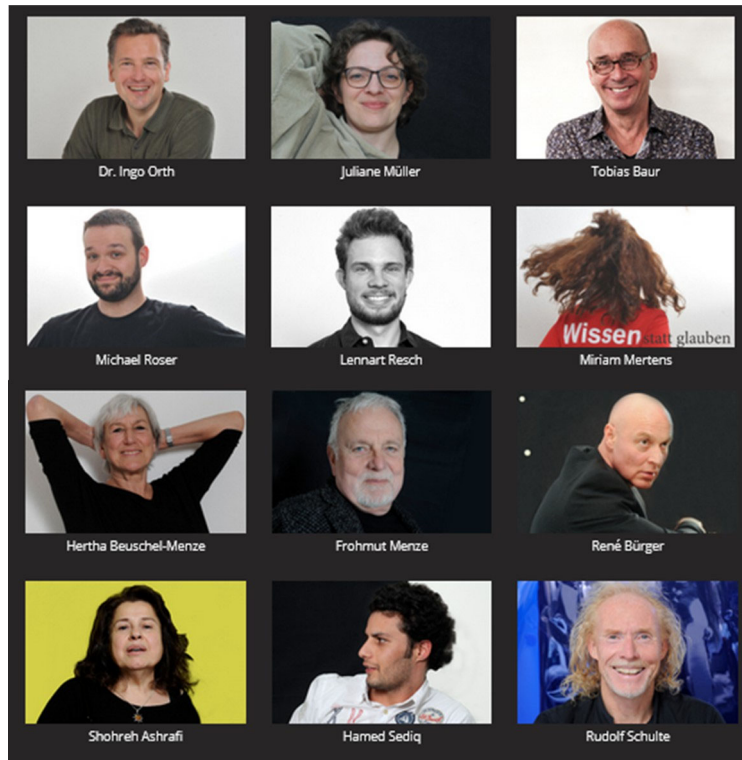
Over the years... “Last but not least”: Who’s Who by Evelin.

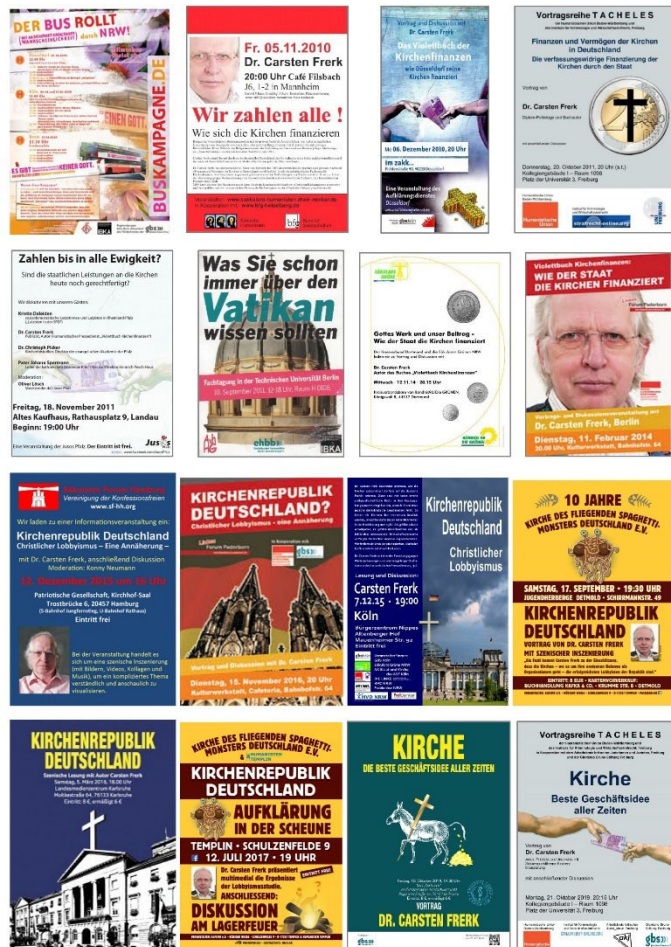
It all began in March 2006, when I (Carsten) was invited to give my first talks but couldn’t travel on my own because I was suffering from panic attacks at the time. Evelin accompanied me; once we were there, she realised she could make something of it for herself, and that’s how the idea of ‘giving humanism a face’ came about. Since

then, more than 1,200 women and men whom she has been able to photograph.

In that sense, this collection is also a ‘tribute’ to Evelin, without whose photography much of this would not have been preserved or remembered.







Posters

A selection of posters from recent years – for talks I gave or events in which I was involved. It illustrates the diversity of secular organisations: each one stands on its own, with no single standard for all.

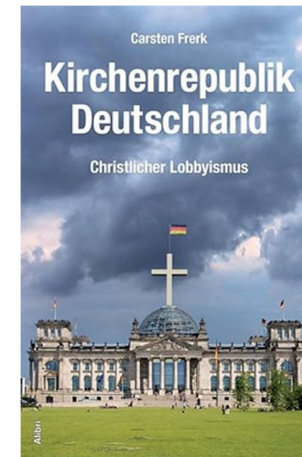
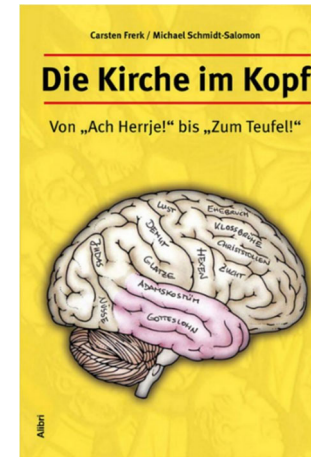
This is a strength – and as the saying goes: the greatest strength is also the greatest weakness.



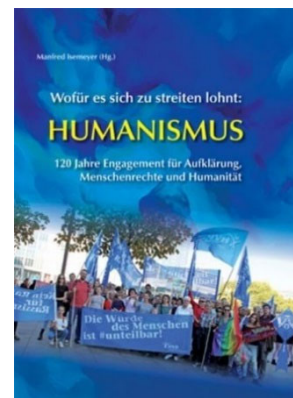
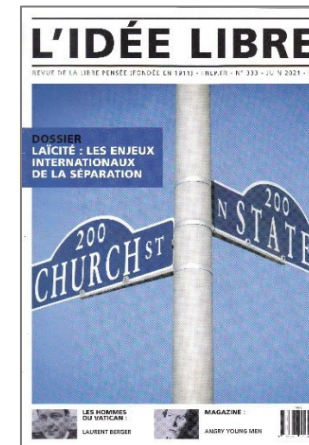
Books

on the subject
State, Church, Religion

The books can
be downloaded as PDFs from my
(CF) website.



Contributions to the following anthologies, journals, etc. (in chronological order)–3



The texts can be found, for the most part, on my (CF) website
..... under 'Essays and Articles'