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SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



CAUGHT BETWEEN FRUSTRATION AND NEW BEGINNINGS
WHY DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM IS SO IMPORTANT



EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools

WHY DIALOGUE WITH ISLAM IS SO IMPORTANT

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Dear Reader,

Christchurch, Sri Lanka, Pittsburgh – places that represent the latest level of escalation in hate that is murderous and religiously motivated. And meanwhile, Nazis parade through the streets of Plauen (on the eve of the Holocaust memorial day!) with flags, drums, uniforms and highly official police authorisation, not only trampling underfoot the European flag but also values such as respect, tolerance, religious freedom and human dignity. Enough is enough!

We have often dealt with the subject of interreligious dialogue in past issues of the Schneller Magazine. And this topic features again in this issue – but with a heightened awareness that such dialogues and the people who stand up for them are exposed to an increasing wave of attacks. At the same time, we are convinced that only dialogue will allow us to work together to find answers to the problems facing mankind which are now threatening the whole planet.

This is how my colleague Solomon Benjamin expressed the concept of solidarity in a Christian/Muslim/Hindu context. Katja Dorothea Buck reports about the first international Taizé meeting in the Arab world in Beirut. It turned out to be an impressive encounter between Christians and Muslims. Pia Dieling from the Centre for Ecumenism of the two churches in Hesse discusses the latest international papers on dialogue. On the other hand, Georg Wenz, Advisor for Islamic affairs at the Protestant Church in the Palatinate, pleads for more lightness in dialogue. The Indonesian theologian Lidya Tandirerung describes the situation in her country. Finally, Martin Repp and I present some aspects from the work of the two intercultural, ecumenical and interreligious study programmes of the EMS.

Naturally, the work of the two Schneller schools also takes up a large part of this issue. And last but not least, we give you some insights into a debate unleashed by our last issue on the way the West perceives the Middle East, for which we received a flurry of readers' letters.

On behalf of our team of editors, I wish you an enjoyable summer, hoping that there will be a lull in the spate of terrible news.

Yours



Uwe Gräbe



IN SEARCH OF HUMAN SOLIDARITY

Sitting in a train in India and looking around at people, I have often noticed that whenever we pass by a church, I see hands making the sign of the cross. Later as we pass by a temple, I see people folding their hands in adoration and respect. In front of a mosque, I also notice a few people holding their spiritual chain and kissing it with respect. This often signals the existence of faith, religion and trust which people display in God.

The recent events like the shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, the killings in Nigeria, the attacks in Sri Lanka, the destruction of churches in India, the perennial disharmony in Palestine have brought immense agony to human life. Often I ask myself, is this what God wants humans to do: to hate one another? Or is it a human expression about our faithfulness to God? God does not need human efforts to protect Him, as divinity remains supernatural and all-powerful. Humans have created divisions in faith. God remains God, whether God has worshippers or not and holy places are filled with devotees or not. God is above all human-made cultures and barriers.

In Exodus 3 we see an encounter between God and Moses. Moses walked often on Mount Sinai but that day, God uses a green bush burning in order to draw the attention of Moses. God is a creative communicator. God spoke to Moses, saying Moses is standing on holy ground and he should remove his sandals. The moment Moses removed his sandals, he was in direct contact with the ground reality of life. It hurt his feet and he had pain from the thorns and the heat. God said that "If this hurts you so much Moses,

how much more do you think it hurts me? I heard my people's cry and I will come down to deliver them." Moses realised what God was telling him and understood his concern for all humanity and that God is not the God of temples and synagogues alone.

When God speaks to us and when we see the realities of life on the streets, homeless people, encounters of injustice to women, children on streets, poor, needy and many other forms, God speaks to us in many ways, He encounters us, and the place becomes holy.

In his book "God Is Not A Christian", Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes "It does not matter where we worship or what we call God; there is only one, inter-dependent human family. We are born for goodness, to love – free of prejudice. All of us, without exception. There is greater commonality in our belief systems than we tend to credit, a golden thread expressed in the maxim that one should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself."

Tutu also writes: "Much as I would love to see all the world's churches, mosques, synagogues and temples overflowing with humanity, how good we are is not measured by the number of times we attend formal religious ceremonies but how we live in harmony and share life in a community."

For six years, I worked with Hindus and Muslims in Hyderabad at a time when there were repeated murders and homicides, especially between Muslims and Hindus. During this difficult time of hatred, the Church organised a special



God comes alive when we face the realities of life, for example, when we realise the need of the other.

programme on life affirming, where many who survived spoke. One, a Muslim imam, showed a huge wound on his back and explained that during the riots, another Muslim severely injured him with a knife in his back. The imam was trying to bring a Hindu family to safety and nevertheless managed to save the Hindu family. He described his injury as a „peace sign“.

The basic thrust of most religions is to bring one closer to God and to one's own neighbour. The differences often come only in identifying the name and description of God and neighbour. Because we are all God's creatures, everyone experiences God in their own way, relating to each other as people of faith in dialogue.

Dialogue is to establish contact, presence, communication, relationship and understanding between persons or

communities. This does not demand change in the persons. Such dialogue affirms life of the other person or community; it enables people to share their basic resources; it guides people to recognise each other's search for God and leads people to recognise common human values such as justice and dignity.

*Reverend Solomon P. Benjamin is
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Evangelical Mission
in Solidarity (EMS).*

BETWEEN REALITY AND POTENTIAL

A document and its meaning

The “Document on human fraternity for world peace and living together”, which Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Cairo, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, both signed, can serve as a guideline for “a culture of dialogue”. It remains to be seen how many people align their actions according to this document.

When Pope Francis landed on the Arabian peninsula at about 21.00 local time on 3rd February, his visit was a sensation. Pope Francis is the first pope to visit Abu Dhabi to reach agreement in a joint declaration on Christian-Islamic coexistence with Ahmad Mohammad Al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of the University of Al-Azhar in Cairo, officially the highest authority of Sunni Islam.

The content of this document follows on from the “Nostra Aetate” declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions at the Second Vatican Council in 1965. It already expressed respect towards Islam and called for mutual understanding. The declaration on fraternity – it may have been more appropriate to speak of neighbourliness – goes a significant step further than “Nostra Aetate”. It was adopted equally by the leaders of both religions. In this equality lies the special potential for Muslim-Christian dialogue, also in a West European context.

Populist movements in society regard Oriental Islam as a threat to Western Christianity. However, against this trend is the call for peaceful liberal togetherness



Photo: humanfraternitymeeting.com

Like two brothers: the Pope and the Grand Imam greet each other.

without any fanaticism or extremism. It appeals not to misuse the name of God for the purpose of terrorism and violence. In the end, "God, the Almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want His name to be used to terrorise people." As a whole, the document can serve as a guideline towards a "culture of dialogue" in peace in the name of all people, irrespective of their generation or social status.

A whole paragraph in the declaration is devoted to the recurrent (negative) image of women often portrayed by the Catholic Church in this country and in Islamic societies. It states that the dignity of women must be protected so that they may fully enjoy their rights. This harbours the potential for an interreligious dialogue between equals with the same rights. However, it remains to be seen how far women's rights go when most translations of the declaration exclude the use of the feminine gender in the title and when another part of the document condemns abortion, placing it in the same context as genocide, human and organ trafficking and euthanasia.

A second look at the host country shows that it is also involved in military actions. The United Arab Emirates are leading the war in Yemen and are fighting against the Shi'ite Houthi rebels alongside Saudi Arabia. In the end, is the Pope's visit and the declaration only an exercise in positive publicity so that the Emirates can demonstrate that they are open to inter-religious dialogue in the Arab region? Christians of both genders are permitted to celebrate church services and build churches there – in stark contrast to the conservative Islamic neighbour Saudi Arabia. From the hosts' point of view, the

joint declaration was certainly not altruistic with regard to Abu Dhabi's reputation in the world. Has the Pope allowed himself to be blinded by the glamour of interreligious dialogue? He must be well aware that he was photographed not only together with the Grand Imam but also with the head of the Emirates government, Sheikh Al-Maktoum of Dubai. However, the Pope also reminded the ruling leaders in his address of their responsibility towards the poor and mentioned the war in Yemen.

The document offers an important impetus for the non-Muslims living in the United Arab Emirates. It calls for full citizenship with all rights and protection of religious buildings. In addition, the term 'minorities' is rejected since "its misuse paves the way for hostility and discord; it undoes any successes and takes away the religious and civil rights of some citizens who are thus discriminated against."

All in all, the joint document contains enormous potential and encourages emulation for the coexistence of religions. It will be interesting to follow up on whether this leads to positive developments in the Arab region.

Pia Dieling is a student of theology and wrote this text during her internship at the Centre for Ecumenism in Frankfurt.

OPENING THE FRONT DOOR

The importance of light-hearted relations in dialogue

Official declarations on dialogue remind us what lies at the centre of Christianity and Islam: a focus on God in our thoughts and deeds and therefore on our humanity. But this also needs space where this humanity can be lived and experienced.

In 2006, the Norwegian “Kirkelig kulturverksted” (Church Culture Workshop) in Oslo published an extraordinary CD entitled “Dialogue”. The two singers Javed Bashir (Pakistan) and Sondre Bratland (Norway) blended Muslim Sufi texts and old Norwegian church songs in a previously unknown way. The audio experience hints at the core of inter-religious encounter. Inspired by a spiritual profundity, the two artists embark on a joint exchange where one’s own self begins to shine while still giving the other space.

The CD is also important for a totally different reason. It takes the challenge of interreligious encounters seriously in order to proclaim the certainty of one’s own faith in the other’s house. The two singers presented their repertoire both in mosques in Lahore as well as in churches in Norway. In the end, they met in the large Umayyaden Mosque in Damascus to record the CD.

Very rarely have such interreligious encounters achieved such an intensity in Germany. Encounters seem to be overly “cerebral” and talks centre only on problems. Meetings in the past several years have not been shaped by an involvement in the aesthetics of one’s own faith traditions or being in awe about the

other’s devotion to God. Rather, they have been ruled by integration, social and religious or political issues. What has been left by the wayside is the light-heartedness during the preliminary phases of getting to know each other at a buffet, invitations in the neighbourhood and a cultural programme. Instead, discussions have gone more in depth, which was admittedly conducive to clarifying who one is dealing with on the other side.

However, the dialogue experience suffered under the latent inadequacy attributed to the Islamic partner. “Integration deficits” or “pre-modern backwardness” are just some of the underlying allegations which branded a one-sided obligation. As a consequence, you may miss hearing the claim of making a separate Islamic contribution to social development with Islamic values and standards. There were only occasional moments of closeness, awareness and even understanding since participants were talking at cross purposes.

So it’s good that explanations about the Christian-Muslim dialogue take place at regular intervals, both on Christian and Muslim sides, and also in joint responsibility, such as the “Document on human fraternity for world peace and living together” published in February and signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of the University of Al-Azhar in Cairo, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb. Scholars, religious leaders and dignitaries repeatedly stake out a new general framework for dialogue encounters in proclamations of this kind. This type of document is necessarily abstract from concrete situations. Not always or very rarely do

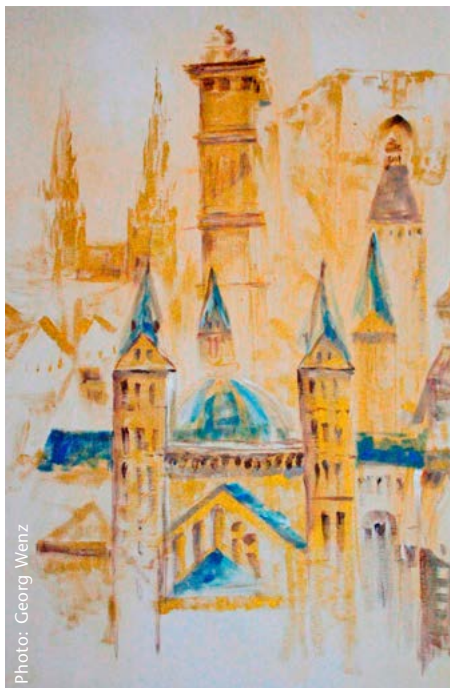


Photo: Georg Wenz

On the 20th anniversary of the Christian-Islamic discussion group in Ludwigshafen, the Syrian artist Husein Ahmet immortalised in a painting the Speyer Cathedral and the minaret of a mosque in Aleppo.

they find their way to the foundation. However, simply the press announcement of its appearance reminds us what lies at the centre of Christianity and Islam: a focus on God in our thoughts and deeds and therefore on our humanity.

For example, this was expressed in two dialogue memorial services in Mannheim, one for the massacre of Christchurch and the other for victims of the attacks in Sri Lanka. Through all that transpired – the thoughts and prayers delivered in sermons, the songs and recitations, the symbolic gestures, the listening, compas-

sion and mourning – there shone a connection between the people attending, the Jews, the Christians and Muslims, women, men, young adults and children, and this led them to forget the fragility of coexistence for a moment. It is experiences such as these that make us understand why places need to be found urgently where people can meet as they are, where they can plan and create something together.

A tradition which may appeal to both religions is Abraham's table fellowship with strangers. While eating, people come closer, deep conversations are started and people make surprising discoveries. But the most important takes place before: sending out the invitations and opening the front door. When transposed to dialogue, their success really depends on one's own initiative, no matter what the context or the level at which the dialogue is supposed to be held.

Dr Georg Wenz is Advisor in Islamic affairs of the Protestant Church of the Palatinate.

PEELING ONIONS FOR DAVID AND CHRISTINE

Christians and Muslims come together at the Taizé meeting in Beirut

Pope Francis and the Sheikh Al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayyeb appealed to Christians and Muslims all over the world to meet each other as sisters and brothers in the document on human fraternity which was signed in Abu Dhabi at the beginning of February. What this might look like was celebrated in Lebanon at the end of March – at the First International Ecumenical Youth Meeting with the Taizé brothers in the Middle East.

Official rituals are important. Christians and Muslims have lived side by side in Lebanon for many centuries, sometimes peacefully and sometimes less peacefully. To strengthen what they have in common, Christian and

Muslim clergy joined together some years ago to declare a national holiday on 25th March. Since 2010, Christians and Muslims have commemorated the annunciation to Mary that she was pregnant with God's son (Christian version) or with the Prophet Jesus (Muslim version).

This year, over 2,000 Christians and Muslims celebrated the day in an exhibition hall near Beirut's port – together with the brothers of the Taizé ecumenical monastery community. In the days leading up to the meeting, they had already met with 1,600 young Christians mainly from the Arab region for joint prayers and workshops.

Now, as Muslims were present, there had to be some redecoration. All crosses



Photo: Katja Buck

A Muslim girls' choir sings before the icon of the annunciation listened by Christian and Muslim dignitaries, the Taizé brothers and 2,000 others.

and icons were removed from the large exhibition hall. Only one icon was allowed to remain. The beamer casts a large format picture of a Byzantine icon on the wall depicting the angel and Mary. Songs with no reference to Christ are sung from the rich repertoire of the Taizé community. Muslims can also join in songs such as "Bless the Lord my soul" or "Ô toi, l'au-delà de tout" (O you who stands above all) without any misgivings. In the same way, all can recite the intercessionary prayers for peace in the world, people in need and mindful togetherness. Later a Muslim girls' choir sings before the icon of Mary as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

Dialogue between Christianity and Islam need images that show it works! But it also needs personal encounters. Mohammed and Lea can relate to this. "I spent seven days with people with whom I first thought we had absolutely nothing in common," says Lea. A year ago, the young Christian woman took part in an interreligious academy. "We found things we had in common and learnt how to celebrate our differences."

There again, Mohammed was in Taizé last summer and spent several weeks in the community there. "I learnt that my opposite was just as human as I am. We share a common dignity." In the openness of the Taizé community he was allowed to be who he is. It was a special experience while peeling onions in the kitchen to simply enjoy "that I'm doing this so that David and Christine and whoever they may be can have something good to eat." Lea and Mohammed represent a young generation that longs for encounters with others and that wants to discover new horizons.

But anyone who wants to cross borders needs trust. In a region where corruption, war, violence and hate dictate life all too frequently, this is easier said than done. The young Christians who took up the joint invitation of twelve Lebanese churches and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) come from mainly Arab countries. One group of Greek Orthodox Christians came from Aleppo in Syria. The young people have eight years of war behind them. Chaldean Christians travelled from war-torn Iraq. And young Copts came all the way from Egypt. In the past several years, their churches have been the repeated targets of attacks by Islamic groups. Even 30 young Anglicans from Palestine managed the trip – by taking a large detour via Amman. That's because the direct route from Israel to Lebanon is not possible. They were able to enter the country at Beirut airport with brand-new passports bearing no Israeli stamp.

They all long for exchange with young people from other countries and churches. With their deep spirituality which allows enormous breadth at the same time, the Taizé brothers create exactly what is needed for this: a climate of trust. "Eight years after the start of the Arab Spring, after so many bitter disappointments, it is not easy to hope again," says Brother Émile, who spent one and a half years preparing for this meeting together with youth groups from the Lebanese churches. "We want to encourage young people to hope and help them build trust again." And then he shifts to talking about the central point of encountering the other. "We need each other in our diversity," he says. This almost sounds as if he was quoting the Qur'an where one Surah says:

God created humans different so that they complement each other.

This is also the spirit in which the document of human fraternity was written and which was signed in Abu Dhabi at the beginning of February by Pope Francis and the highest representative of Sunni Islam, the Sheikh al-Azhar, Ahmed al-Tayyeb. Praise for this initiative has come from all sides since it is the first time that two high representatives of Christianity and Islam have signed a joint appeal for fraternal togetherness between Christians and Muslims. The photos of Francis and Ahmed embracing each other like two brothers went all over the world.

But what role can such a document take on for dialogue beyond the present? Is it not more important to create space where Christians and Muslims can meet in a relaxed atmosphere as happened recently in Beirut? Souraya Bechealany, Secretary General of the MECC, who coordinated the international youth meeting, does not want to play out the official dialogue between dignitaries against work with people on the ground. "Both are needed," says the theologian. "Youth meetings in a relaxed, happy atmosphere are important to remove prejudices and build relationships." On the other hand, the Abu Dhabi document is important

since the Vatican and the Azhar jointly declare that fraternity is not only founded in each religion but is something universal to all humans. "The document is an important pillar for theological teaching, as those who train future Christian and Muslim clerics can now refer to it."

Katja Dorothea Buck



Brother Alois, Prior of Taizé talking to a young man from Egypt.



Work Group of
Christian Churches in
Baden-Wuerttemberg
**Can Christians and
Muslims pray together?
– An Orientation Guide
(only in German)**

Stuttgart 2019, 116 Pages

2.50 Euro plus shipping

Can be ordered from ACK in Baden-
Wuerttemberg, Stafflenbergstrasse 46,
70184 Stuttgart, ackbw@t-online.de

No ready-made answers

At the beginning of this year, the Work Group of Christian Churches (ACK) in Baden-Wuerttemberg published a very helpful guide in its latest brochure “Can Christians and Muslims pray together?” However, the brochure offers no ready-made answers – and rightly so since there are so many different contexts in which Christians and Muslims meet in Germany. Whether it is at the day-care centre, school, university, in the neighbourhood, intercultural families, at a sick person’s bed or in the event of death or accidents – every situation demands new creativity and empathy on the question whether joint prayer can be made and if so, how. It also needs a basic background knowledge of theology – not only about Islam. This is exactly what this brochure provides. For example, although it is common to bestow God’s blessing on others in a Christian encounter, this need not necessarily apply to Muslims. This is because Islam does not accept any mediator between God and humans.

The editors present many practical examples how Christians and Muslims can meet each other at a spiritual level in specific situations. And here lies precisely the value of this brochure. For example, it contains both Christian and Islamic prayers. It also contains official statements and guidelines from each of the churches. This is because Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical churches often have very different approaches to the issue. It shows once again that in an ecumenical context there can be no common open-and-shut answers to certain issues and this is not needed. Interreligious encounters then often experience a special kind of dynamism when they are regarded as multilateral and not merely as bilateral events.

It is a real bonus that the ACK Baden-Wuerttemberg also allowed four theologians to voice their opinions (an Orthodox, an Evangelical, an Evangelical Methodist and a Muslim) and to present their own answers. In fact, the four texts once again make the ambivalence of the question quite clear so that every person must find his or her own answer. However, the brochure provides its readers with so much orientation that each reader can ask himself or herself this question.

All in all, the publication should appeal to a wide audience; and the members of the ACK should provide the financial means to offer a more readerfriendly presentation in a second edition of the guide. Based on its contents, this publication well deserves this!

Katja Dorothea Buck

SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES OF ENCOUNTER

The SiMO Study Programme and interreligious dialogue

Many students from Germany connect a period of studying theology in Beirut with the hope of getting better acquainted with Islam. Anybody seeking direct dialogue with Muslims at the evangelical seminary of the NEST will perhaps be surprised. It is precisely there that he or she will receive in-depth insights into a society where Christians and Muslims have lived for centuries.

In the beginning there are images: a neighbourhood in the Orient about 1,400 years old where Christians and Muslims live. Lebanon is a cosmopolitan country of many cultures; it is also the only country in the Middle East where there is a high percentage of Christians and as a result, they meet their Muslim neighbours at eye level.

Every year, the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) sends students to the Near East School of Theology (NEST) for two semesters as part of the “Studies in the Middle East” (SiMO). The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau also sends pastors of both genders to Beirut on a further training programme lasting several months. Some of them then ask after Muslim partners whom they have been looking forward to talk to. But it is not as simple there as it may perhaps be in Germany – that everyone simply sits at a table and starts a conversation.

Even in cosmopolitan Lebanon Christians and Muslims do not do everything together. Metaphorically speaking, one

may have friends “on the other side” – but it is not common to get married to each other. A person’s community, one’s family and one’s denomination offer a general orientation framework to provide mutual support and reassurance – but the boundaries are not overstepped unnecessarily.

Many students from Germany may perhaps ask themselves at the beginning: why is Islam taught at such an elementary level at the NEST – and on top of that by an American Christian professor? Would it not be much better if a female Muslim lecturer were to take over the Islam courses? Well, explains a person in charge at NEST, for many local students (especially from Syria), it is a new and unfamiliar experience for a Christian to speak at all positively about Islam. This is not usual in many families and Christian groups.

The NEST opens up the unimagined opportunity to immerse oneself in the real life of five local Protestant churches for which the seminary trains the next generation of pastors. What takes place at the NEST is the personal affirmation of a tiny Protestant community which sees itself as an integral part of the Middle Eastern church landscape and society.

When viewed from an inside perspective, something that normally remains closed to students who only stay for a short time, the SiMO student gains an insight into ecumenical processes that are always exciting and highly dynamic. A setting where Syrian, Lebanese, Jordanian and Palestinian students sit at your side during a lecture, pray next to you in the



Photo: EMS/Gräbe

On an outing to the Qadisha Valley, SiMO students meet the Maronite monk Darío Escobar who has lived as hermit in a hermitage for almost twenty years.

chapel and live on the same floor is a challenge which literally challenges you to change your view on things.

In addition, the study year in Beirut is also an interreligious project. Getting to know a local Christian community's perspective on Islam from the inside – including the unexpected wealth (and ballast) of past experiences this community has made – this might be a unique precondition to actual interfaith dialogue: Where else does one have the chance to personally attend a hearing at a Sharia court arranged by contacts of the Islam lecturer, for example?

In the end, many of the encounters take place outside the official study programme which consists of two courses per semester with credits. This creates a freedom that can only be filled on your own responsibility: Some may want to delve deeper into local community life. Others may perhaps want to take on duties in the old people's home of the local evangelical church; or even in Palestinian refugee

camps where they come into direct contact with mostly Sunni residents and this again leads to a totally different dialogue of life. Or they simply make friends with their tandem partners for learning Arabic, with acquaintances at the bar... Not all possibilities may be recognisable at first glance. But there are plenty of them available!

Uwe Gräbe

INFO

Further information about the SiMO Study Programme is available online at <https://ems-online.org/weltweit-aktiv/studienprogramme/>

MEETING HALF WAY, TALKING TO EACH OTHER

Why budding theologians should learn about interreligious dialogue

In the past, dialogue was a hobby for a few interested parties; today, it is the order of the day. In the Interreligious Studies in Japan Program (ISJP), theology students learn how to communicate with members of other religions.

The fact that dialogue has become the order of the day comes from the religious pluralisation of Germany brought about by the immigration of Muslim guest workers and mission by Hindus and Buddhists. This fundamental change brings to light the social and political relevance of dialogue and places politicians and theologians before enormous challenges. Dialogue means that believers of different religions meet half way and seek exchange. The aims are to become better acquainted with each other, clarify misunderstandings and prejudices and strive towards peaceful coexistence in society.

When different cultures and religions meet, conflicts often arise, such as when Muslims try to implement their views on law, society and gender roles or the relationship between religion and state in Europe. At first, some politicians and media representatives were of the opinion that “multi-culti” was the solution; others thought they could merely sit out these problems by ignoring them. Now they realise that Sharia, honour killings etc. reveal deep religious and cultural differences which are honestly debated in public.

Admittedly, this requires a certain ability to communicate as it is not enough to exclude critical topics by friendly talks and interreligious celebrations, as many believe. Things must be discussed, for instance when the Turkish Ministry of Religion finances staff in Germany whose primary duty it is to serve their state and not to further social integration. This kind of situation requires a cultivated discussion that clearly

names and analyses the conflicts and their causes and in which both sides endeavour to achieve peaceful coexistence in society.

Up to now, interreligious and intercultural communication in Germany cannot exactly be descri-



Photo: Martin Repp

Participants in the Interreligious Studies in Japan Program (ISJP) talking to a Zen monk in a monastery in Kyoto.

bed as social togetherness crowned with success since it mainly pursues the principle of “trial and error”, in other words the most elementary learning principle that we know. But today, it is possible to learn the “techniques” of interreligious dialogue in countries which have long been multi-religious and where Christian institutions have gathered sufficient know-how about encounter between religions. Personally, I was honoured to learn the entire “repertoire” of interreligious communication in Japan. This ranged from representatives of Shinto, a religion which worships the forces of nature, the various schools of Buddhism through to new modern religions including controversial groups such as Aum Shinrikyo, which was accused of terrorism.

When a German theology student once attended a meeting with representatives of Aum at the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions in Kyoto, she observed that conversations on the matter were conducted in a harsh but friendly manner whereas in the past, a talk on religion with a controversial group at a university in Germany were only wrought with conflict. This observation led to the idea of founding a study programme for interreligious dialogue in Kyoto in cooperation with the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS).

The Interreligious Studies in Japan Program (ISJP) teaches the essential principles of interreligious learning:

- In a foreign culture, a person realises that learning the language is indispensable for everyday communication as well as to understand other religions. **Intercultural communication is the basis for interreligious communica-**

tion. When we study theology, we must learn Hebrew and Greek in order to understand the foreign way of thinking in the Bible and not to engross ourselves too hastily in our own personal horizon.

- We must study **other religions based on religious scientific methodology** to avoid theological projection, something which theology has a tendency to do with its “Christian glasses”. Other religions should firstly be understood for themselves before passing judgement.
- In the end, experiencing an encounter with a foreign religion must also be **reflected upon and “processed” from a theological perspective**; this is what happens in the theology of religion.

These three learning steps provide students of theology with the right preparation for encounters with other religions, even in Germany.

Dr Martin Repp is a retired pastor of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau.

From 1988 to 2004, he was an ecumenical co-worker of the EMS at the NCC Center for the Study of Japanese Religions. From 2004 to 2009, he lectured as Professor for Comparative Religious Studies at a Buddhist University. Both of these posts were in Kyoto. Repp started the ISJP which manages the NCC Study Center in collaboration with the EMS.

INFO

Further information:

<https://ems-online.org/weltweit-aktiv/studienprogramme/>

NOT ONLY TOLERANT BUT ALSO IN SOLIDARITY

How interreligious dialogue can be developed in Indonesia

In Indonesia there are increasing tensions between Christians and Muslims. “Muslims and Christians are responsible to step onto a more radical level of solidarity as their true religious responsibility,” says Dr Lidya K Tandirerung. The pastor of the Toraja Church, an EMS partner church, lectures in intercultural and ecumenical theology at the Theological Seminary in Makassar.

Will fundamentalism spread even more in Indonesia in the coming years?

It is indeed undeniable that fundamentalism is increasing among the Indonesian people. Part of this is due to the greater incursion of global Wahhabism entering the country. Its ideology has interfered in the existing traditional Islam which is more cultural and hospitable to plurality in the culture here. Many moderate Muslims are worried that extremist minority groups could potentially force their will on the country's moderate Muslim majority. Some extremist religious leaders preach hatred against other religious groups.

How is this changing coexistence?

In my home province of South Sulawesi some regents have implemented the so-called “aspect of Shari’s law”. This ranges from the implementation of Islamic dress codes for women in public to prohibitions on alcohol consumption and gambling; specific requirements also stipulate that local village heads, candidates for political office, government servants seeking promotion, pupils and students have to be

able to read the Qur’an in Arabic. Several agencies have passed regulations preventing women from entering government services if they do not wear head scarves. These regulations of course do not apply to non-Muslims but they influence equal access to public roles and participations.

High-level representatives from all religions in Indonesia repeatedly call for peaceful coexistence in Indonesia. Does this call have a big influence on people’s thoughts and actions?

I appreciate the initiative by the Joint Regulation of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs to regulate the establishment of the Centre of Religious Harmony Forum at national level as well as forums at the provincial and regency levels. This affirms that inter-religious harmony is still one of the main concerns in government programs. However, the politicisation of religion has become a concern. Religious leaders should not abuse their authority for political interests but help people to contribute more to the betterment of socio-economic life. The Communion of Churches in Indonesia has therefore called us to be aware of many forms of power abuse.

In your opinion, what is needed so that Christian-Muslim coexistence can live more peacefully?

I admit that dialogue is not just chit-chat. The primary purpose is to learn to understand each other and meet each other as equals. The language of acceptance in Christian-Muslim coexistence in Indonesia must be a language of solidarity. We must

bear the responsibilities of putting our religious and cultural traditions into practice rather than simply conduct a dialogue of tolerance which is in nature mostly not sincere and less committed to changes in the society. These two religions, Islam and Christianity, are responsible for stepping onto a more radical level of solidarity, including global commitment and solidarity to end all kinds of ideological violence and here, both religions must admit their own contributions to this throughout history.

Can international partners contribute to ensuring that Christians and Muslims in Indonesia have a peaceable future?

They are hoping for sustainable peaceful coexistence in Indonesia, for example in fields related to education. Cross-cultural collaboration will also be very useful in preparing young people to realise the global challenges. Community-based economic empowerment projects are urgently needed to transform people's lives and prevent radicalism triggered as compensation against severe poverty.

What relationship do you maintain with the Islamic religious community?

I grew up in a family of genuine diversity and later pursued a career in tune with my inter-faith calls. I am currently involved in maintaining a long-standing academic cooperation between our school, the Theological Seminary of Eastern Indonesia (STT INTIM Makassar) and the State Islamic University Sultan Alauddin (UIN Alauddin Makassar). We work in the field of lecturer exchange and intensive collaboration of students' programmes and other educational and dialogue programmes. Since 2006, I have been teaching at

the department of theology (Ushuluddin) at UIN Alauddin. With inter-faith friends, I also initiated and am currently active in the Inter-faith Brother-Sisterhood which works intensively to target youth and student communities to be inter-religiously inclusive. There is a particular urgency to embrace the campus community since it is vulnerable to radical ideologies. The aim of the community is to embrace inter-faith youth with a vision to bring about a pluralist, humanist and nationalist young generation in Indonesia.

The interview was conducted by Katja Dorothea Buck and Hans Heinrich, Indonesia Liaison Secretary at the EMS.



Photo: EMS/Mayer

Rev. Dr Lidya K. Tandirerung is committed at many levels to dialogue with Muslims in her home country.

DRUMMING WITH THE GREAT-GRANDSON

Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS). In the middle of April, Nikolas Geschwill, great-grandson of Hermann Schneller, paid a visit to the children at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS). Together with five team members, Geschwill had been at the Caritas Lebanon in Jounieh where they had offered drum workshops to Syrian refugee children in several camps. The drummer and percussionist wanted to take this opportunity to visit the school which his great-grandfather had founded in Khirbet Kanafar 67 years ago.



Nikolas Geschwill sets the rhythm for the children to follow.

After a tour of the school, Geschwill held a spontaneous drumming lesson for pupils. For many children this was the first time they had played a drum. "It was astounding how Nikolas Geschwill managed to get about forty pupils to follow his rhythm on the drums," says George Haddad, Director of the JLSS. "Despite the enormous excitement and high noise levels, he guided the children's drumming with rhythms, crescendos and decrescendos. Drumming helped the children let go of their tension and fear.

Afterwards, the teachers and educators noticed that many children were more relaxed and quieter. This had a positive effect on afternoon classes and on the residential groups in the evening. "We'll definitely have to include drumming workshops in the JLSS programme," says Haddad. Nikolas Geschwill promised to give his support.

MUSIC PROMOTES GREATER SELF-CONFIDENCE

Amman (TSS). The Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman intends to expand artistic subjects in Grades 1 to 10. The school is supported here by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg which is providing over 27,000 Euro to fit out a music room with technical equipment such as microphones, loudspeakers and a mixing console. In addition, several instruments will be purchased, such as a piano, electric pianos, drums and tambourines, recorders, xylophones, triangles, accordions and brass instruments. The funds will also cover the salary of a music teacher for two years.

In general, one-on-one instrument lessons will be increased and integrated in the overall school curriculum. A number of studies and research show that children and young adults who play an instrument perform better in social and academic fields and are generally more satisfied. For the girls and boys at the TSS who mainly come from very poor and complex family backgrounds, learning an instrument can offer an enormous opportunity. In the end, playing an instrument strengthens self-confidence.

MORE ROOM FOR REMEDIAL LESSONS

Amman (TSS). With the help of a generous single donation of 10,000 Euro, the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman can finally carry out its long-desired project. Children and young adults with learning difficulties will receive an extra classroom for remedial lessons. Especially children who have lost their parents, whose parents have separated or who have experienced domestic abuse, suffer from poor concentration and often have difficulties following normal lessons. Many are hyperactive and have problems integrating peacefully into the class group.

In a protected space, they will learn various methods to improve their concentration in mathematics or foreign languages. The important thing is for these children to experience learning success and motivation and learn how to join in normal classes so that they can achieve the grade target at the end of the year. A remedial teacher who is currently visiting the school will look after each child and work out individually tailored remedial programmes.

The school assumes that about 20 girls and boys need special help through remedial lessons. The pupils in question come mainly from grades three to six. And like all other offers, this is not dependent on skin colour, religion or gender. For instance, Palestinian children from the neighbouring Hittin camp can benefit just as much as Iraqi refugees or Jordanian pupils who live at the TSS.

AT LAST, FURTHER TRAINING AGAIN

Stuttgart (EVS). With the generous support (over 11,000 Euro) from the Synod of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg, the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Khirbet Kanafar can again offer many vital further training courses to teachers and educators. The offer includes courses on handling computer programs in class, educational workshops to integrate children with handicaps, short further training courses for teachers and travel costs for three senior experts to come from Germany and train the instructors in the workshops on the CNC machine or in mechatronics.

The money for further teacher training courses had been lacking for many years since the school had to face the drastic increases in salary for employees in public service which the Lebanese parliament adopted by law in 2017.

THE FORGOTTEN REFUGEES OF THE BEKAA VALLEY

EMS and EVS help after severe flooding

Hundreds and thousands of people fled from the war in Syria across the border to neighbouring Lebanon. After heavy snow and rain in February, many refugee camps in the Bekaa Valley were flooded. Despite relief efforts, the situation of the refugees remains dramatic.

When the storms “Norma” and “Miriam” swept across Lebanon at the end of January, they badly damaged the infrastructure, roads and houses, causing floods in several refugee camps. Whole tent settlements were swept away. Vital food supplies were destroyed. The Al-Marj refugee camp in the middle of the Bekaa Valley was also badly affected. The women who are attending a three-month sewing course at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) come from this camp.

It was immediately clear to George Haddad, Director of the JLSS, that the storms and their consequences had hit the people in the temporary camps particularly badly. When he went into the Al-Marj camp, he was shocked. “My heart

feels heavy when I look at the terrible suffering all around us,” he wrote to those in charge at the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS). He reported of the untold suffering of the freezing people who had lost everything they had and he asked for financial support. The EMS and EVS provided special funds amounting to 7,000 Euro so that the refugees could at least be supplied with new carpets, blankets and mattresses.

Haddad wrote an email describing how the relief supplies were brought to the camp. “The scene was totally unreal. Water was everywhere. The further I walked into the camp, the worse things appeared to become. Some tents were completely flooded and no longer accessible. It was bitterly cold. Children were playing with a basketball. They were so used to the water around them that they ran through deep puddles chasing the ball as if it was the most normal thing in the world to do.”

While Haddad and his two assistants from the JLSS were distributing the last supplies, refugees from other parts of the camp came up to him. One man asked him why he was distributing supplies to these inhabitants in particular and not to the others. The situation in other parts of the camp was just as bad. Haddad explained to him that the JLSS was only a small school and not a large aid organisation. But he could well understand the people's anger. “Of course, these people have a right to be angry. Their suffering is unbearable. It is literally like hell here. Nobody



Everything is under water. Many tents are uninhabitable.



Despite the freezing cold children play basketball among the huge puddles.

is helping these desperate and forgotten people,” writes Haddad.

The situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is gradually worsening. Politicians, church leaders and the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Rai have repeatedly called refugees to return to Syria. The small country can no longer look after them and threatens to break down under the permanent overload. To understand these statements, it is important to realise that Lebanon has accepted 1.5 million refugees from Syrian over the past few years – its own population is only 4.5 million inhabitants. If Germany were to accept the same proportion of people in relation to its own population, this would amount to over 25 million people.

However, as long as no practical solution is found to the problem, public demands for refugees to return will continue to worsen sentiment in the country against the refugees. This is what happened to the inhabitants of another refugee camp to the south of the JLSS in February. Unnoticed by international media, the Lebanese authorities ordered the camp to be disbanded and sent bulldozers to raze tents and temporary accommodation to the ground. The inhabitants lost the little they had. The authorities justified their action by the fact that the refugees were draining sewage from the camp into the Litani river and polluting it. But those who know the area know that this is a pretext. Long before the refugees came to the country, the Litani was severely polluted because many Lebanese factories along the river drain their sewage into the river unfiltered.

Thorsten Krüger, Katja Dorothea Buck

WE APPEAL FOR YOUR DONATION

Even if support for the preschool project in the Valley of the Christians is ending this summer, the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) continue to give aid to Syrian refugees – especially in Lebanon. This is why we depend on your donations.

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LIFE WRITES THE BEST STORIES

The new assistant at the EVS Secretariat introduces himself

“Where do you see yourself in the next five to ten years?” Very often, no answer comes from this question which is usually asked at job interviews. It is only later that one realises: “That’s right. This is how I always imagined my future to be.” Life always writes the best stories. It’s the same with me.

My name is Felix Weiss. I am 28 years old and assistant at the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) to the Middle East Liaison Desk and in the Secretariat of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS). In 2010 and 2011, I completed my civil service as part of the Ecumenical Youth Volunteers Programme of the EMS

at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon where I looked after a group of twelve children and young people together with an Arab educator.

The time I spent in Lebanon was simply great. To this day, I notice how much that year changed and enriched me. After learning and deepening my knowledge of various languages, I also experienced the loving care given to children and young adults at the JLSS, no matter what their religion or their social background. My fascination for this work and the Middle East is ultimately the reason that drew me to the EMS and to work with the Schneller schools eight years later.

If you had asked me the question then, I would have been severely pressed for an

answer. The experiences I made there coupled with my interest in economics and politics first motivated me to study social economics at the Evangelical University in Nuremberg. After studies lasting three and a half years followed by a two-and-a-half-year course in Master of Business Administration in social and health care, I started working for the



Eight years ago, Felix Weiss was a volunteer looking after children and young adults at the JLSS.



Today, he is assistant to the EMS Middle East Liaison Desk and in the EVS Secretariat.

Finance Planning department at the Diakonisches Werk in Bavaria. Nevertheless, I was soon drawn back to my home region and so back to the EMS.

Now, the EMS is my new job and I could never have found anything better. To answer the question where I see myself in the next five to ten years – well, I will probably still find out. No matter what life has in store for me, I'm pleased to be here for the time being.

Felix Weiß

SAVE THE DATE

EVS General Meeting 2019

This year, the General Meeting of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) takes place in the **Lukasgemeinde (St Luke Parish) in Stuttgart-Ost on Sunday, 3 November 2019.**

The sermon will be held by **Frank Otfried July, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg.**

The keynote speaker in the afternoon is **Rev. George Haddad**, Director of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon. He will report about the life of children at the school and the challenges currently facing the institution.

All members and friends of the Schneller schools are cordially invited to the event. Members will receive a written invitation to the meeting in good time as well as a description of how to get there.

“A STORY OF NON-DEATH”

International conference on the situation in the Middle East

For the past 20 years, the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) has sent students of theology to the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Lebanon. “Studies in the Middle East” (SiMO) is the only Evangelical programme that offers studies in Oriental churches within their inter-religious context. The sixth joint conference of the NEST, SiMO and EMS took place at the end of April.

As the SiMO programme was started in 1999 and represents a central pillar of the intercultural education work of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). Every year, the EMS sends young theology students from Germany and other countries – recently even from an EMS member church in Korea – for two semesters to the “NEST” in Beirut. Every three years, the German and Lebanese partners also organise a major international consultation. The theme in the anniversary year was: “The impacts of current political and social developments on churches in the Middle East and in Germany – time for spiritual rebuilding?”

For six days, about 60 students, lecturers and pastors of both genders from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Austria, the Netherlands and Germany held discussions at the University of Göttingen and at the Coptic monastery in Höxter-Brenkhausen. The NEST sent a delegation of 13 persons – most of them Syrian women and men.

The high reputation that the SiMO programme enjoys within the Evangelical

Church in Germany (EKD) was clearly shown by the opening speech delivered by Ralf Meister, Bishop of the Church of Hanover and the attendance of Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Chair of the EKD Council who came to the consultation in Brenkhausen at the invitation of the host, Bishop Damian and who appealed for deep intercultural togetherness.

Of course, a repeated focus of the main theme was the situation in Syria. After Bishop Meister’s appeal to the Syrian delegates to name the injustice perpetrated by the Assad regime, the address by Dr Rima Nasrallah (NEST) clearly depicted the dramatic situation in which the Syrians now find themselves. Only half of the Christians who lived in Syria before the war are still in the country; 82 churches have been destroyed or badly damaged. In Iraq almost two thirds of the Christians there have left the country. But still the recent history of Christianity in the region is a „story of non-death“ and not a „story of death“, said Nasrallah. Christians in the country practice a form of “sanctification” which is expressed by their holding onto the presence of Christians in Syria: in service to others no matter where they come from, and in the endeavour of making it clear, even to Muslim neighbours, that they are loved by God.

Adon Naman from Syria also endorsed this. He will soon be sitting his theology examination at the NEST and will then be sent as an assistant pastor in the East Syrian town of Hassakeh. The war was an “alarm signal” for all Christians in Syria and, for instance, led to the members of



Photo: EMS/Gräbe

The 6th International SiMO Consultation found a wonderful host in Bishop Damian (rear row, centre), head of the Coptic monastery in Brenkhausen.

all the churches in the port town of Latakia joining a “hand-in-hand” group to perform practical services for society.

The consultation again showed the importance of these exchanges at academic and practical levels. For this reason, the participants agreed on a joint declaration which calls for the churches in Germany to promote such encounters, to work together towards this aim and thus gain new perspectives for coexistence between various religious communities in Germany.

After the conference, Detlev Knoche, member of the Superior Church Council and Director of the Centre for Ecumenical Work of the two churches in Hesse, invited the delegation from the Middle East to Frankfurt. The Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKHN) has sent pastors of both genders to the NEST for further training for many years. They were able to

celebrate their reunion and anniversary by going on a city tour and enjoying a festive dinner together before the friends from the Middle East boarded the plane back to Beirut.

Uwe Gräbe

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We received a lot of feedback on the two articles “Angry comments instead of confrontation” and “No public debate without trust” in SM 1/2019. In them Katja Dorothea Buck and Uwe Gräbe looked at various aspects of the fact that it is becoming more and more difficult in Germany to hold constructive discussions about the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. We consciously decided to take the approach of double commentary to make it clear that we as bystanders can only do justice to the issue of the Middle East conflict by respecting the many different perspectives. We already pointed this out in the Editorial

and we would like to emphasise it here again: the two articles belong together and reflect the opinion of the editors. The feedback also included comments which were full of allegations and insults. We refuse categorically to print such readers’ letters. Of course, we are pleased to receive readers’ letters which refer to subjects that have no direct reference to articles in the Schneller Magazine but we are unable to print them for space reasons.

The Editorial Team

I find the articles by Katja Dorothea Buck and Dr Uwe Gräbe extremely well formulated and courageous. Thank you for this and the way you both wrote. The two articles complement each other very well.

*Hans-Martin Gloël, Advisor for
Ecumenism and World Responsibility at
the Evangelical Lutheran Church in
Bavaria.*

I “devoured” the Schneller Magazine from A to Z. You are getting better and better! Congratulations. In particular the article on defending the important work in Bad Boll was necessary and well balanced. It is terrible that the surge in hate yelling from settlers and right-wingers is inciting their followers in Germany to do the same. In the past, we had to fight off hate speeches by extreme Arabs. Today, the constant

barrage comes from the other side.

Hartmut Brenner, Heidelberg

You described the present situation with regard to the Middle East conflict very accurately. The last sentence formulated as a rhetorical question sums up the entire dilemma: DIG, Beck, Dr Klein and Dr Schuster from the Central Council have no real arguments. Instead came the enormous generalised blow of sweeping defamation.

Dr Ulrich Kammer, Laubach

Thank you once again for an informative Schneller Magazine 1/2019. If I may permit a critical feedback concerning certain formulations in the article “No public debate without trust”. It may well be that

there are some people who love to find an opportunity “to rail against Jews” or to express themselves in order to “process the roles of their fathers”. However, among the range of people in our regional church who are dealing with the Israeli-Palestine conflict, I know of nobody who fits this pigeon-hole.

Everyone I know acts out of love for Israel and wants a secure future for the Jews – and Palestinians – living there. The only thing is that they believe the present Israeli government is currently jeopardising this future. And they want to discuss this. Almost all those I know come from the spectrum of Aktion Sühnezeichen or similar groups and movements. Through their commitment to such groups they have come to the conclusion that current policies are failing to allow a peaceful future for either the Jews or the Palestinians. I find it an insult how these people are presented in the article.

Of course, “background discussions” are practical and needed in addition to the necessary public debates. However, in my opinion, they should not be played against each other. And the people whose preventive “tactics” are described are less than interested in taking part in such discussions.

So, many thanks and much praise to the Schneller Magazine in general but no praise for this article.

Rev. Dr Jürgen Quack, Reutlingen

I read the article “No public debate without trust” with great interest. As a former South Africa boycott woman, it reminded me a lot of times of the conflict against apartheid. If things were to go according to the will of the EKD leaders, they would still be holding trust-building discussions today with the apartheid regime behind closed doors. What mainly contributed to a mostly peaceful transition to democracy without civil war were world-wide sanctions and boycotts. In the meantime, this has been analysed and recognised by historians.

Hildegard Lenz, Bremen

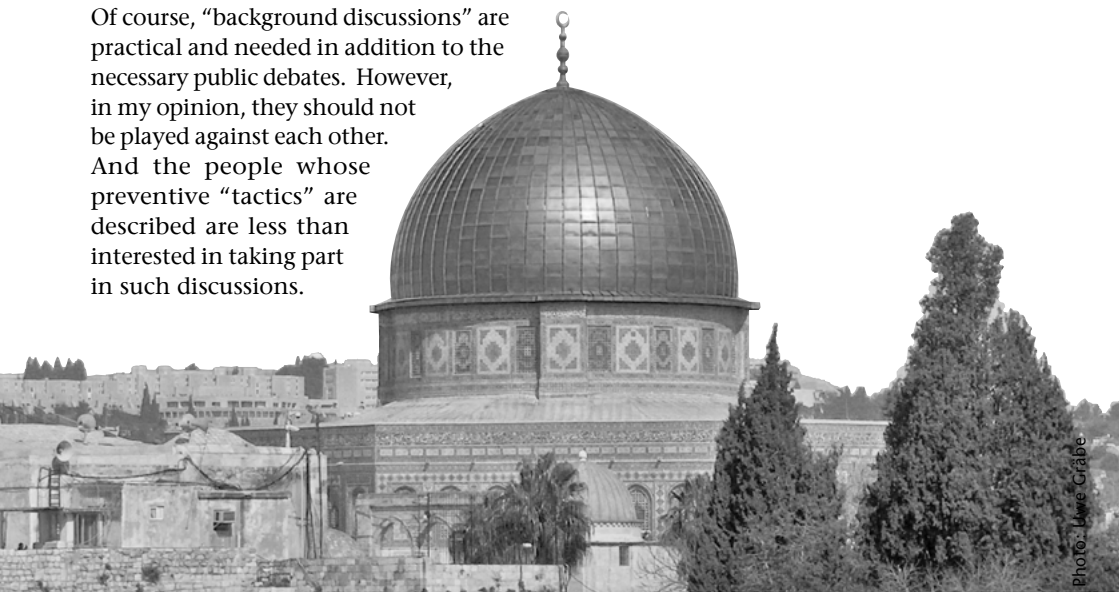


Photo: Iwona Gräbe

I was particularly pleased with the article “Angry comments instead of confrontation” in which you get straight to the point, in my opinion. In the past, the Protestant Academy Bad Boll offered the chance to obtain information about the Israel-Palestine conflict and listen to both sides. Then the German-Palestine Society was no longer permitted to do so. Now somebody has again dared to make the conflict into a theme and immediately the Academy is branded as anti-Semitic by persons unknown.

Bianka Buddeberg, Bremen

The overall issue of Schneller Magazine 1/2019: “Between fascination and incomprehension – What glasses do we wear to view the Middle East?”

Great! Thank you! Really good articles – and again by no means run-of-the-mill reporting. I had to grin about the portrayal of well-meaning Westerners in Amman; that’s exactly what happens and that’s why we give a wide berth to all Westerners (and Koreans) in the Middle East. The local people must go about their long-term and burdensome daily business and short-term helpers get to snap pretty photos with poor refugees. Great that Rima Nasrallah has now been ordained!

Heidi Josua, Weissach im Tal

Thank you for this remarkable issue with courageous and interesting articles!

Gerhard Köhler, Hessisch Oldendorf

I have enjoyed reading the articles published in the new Schneller Magazine. Last week, I have been invited to deliver a presentation to students from Michigan State University at our church. I often quote some information I read in Schneller Magazine.

Nimer Haddad, Lansing (USA)

Thank you very much for the excellent article “When one person knows what the other needs...”. This is exactly what we need. In the end, nothing brings better results than children from different backgrounds, religions, and nationalities, living together, learning together, and working together in harmony. They are building bridges among different communities, without them even knowing that they are doing this most needed thing. This is the essence of the ministry of Schneller Schools. No communities or groups are better bridge-builders than the underprivileged when they live, learn, and work together, as equals in deprivation seeking a better life.

Rev. George D. Haddad, Director of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School, Lebanon

**On Schneller Magazine 4/2018
“Searching and finding God – Between conversion and religious freedom”**

Thank you for the Schneller Magazine particularly working on the problems we are facing today in the changing world regarding the conversion of Muslims and its consequences on the individual and in the community and how it can be resolved through dialogue between the religious communities. I have the sweet memory

of the days we stayed at Johann Ludwig Schneller School, Lebanon.

Rev. T. Augustinus, Vellore (India)

I would like to thank you for the fourth quarter 2018 Schneller Magazine. The articles were interesting and well selected. The issue as a whole is reader friendly and one does leave reading it till the end.

Gaby Haddad, Amman (Jordan)

What is the aim of our existence in life? Mainly to show the reflection of the beauty, brightness and true face of our GOD in our works, talks, behaviour and nothing else. Many times we deviate far from this image. Why did GOD come to me? Because he loves me after saving my soul and washing my sins by his blood while crucified on the Cross. Conversion: if it serves this case as reality, I am with it, if not leave everybody to their faith that is better for them and us too. In the end, what saves us the most is that God is the same for all religions. At the end you can abbreviate the world in one word: in Arabic "al-mahabba", in English "love" and auf Deutsch "Liebe".

George Eid, Lebanon



Obituaries

Thanks and commemoration to Ernst Maxeiner

Ernst Maxeiner, one of our very loyal Schneller friends, died on 26 February 2019 at the age of nearly 93 years. Rev. Hermann Haeberle, who married Ernst and his wife Ursula in Istanbul in 1954, won the couple over to the work at the schools in Khirbet Kanafar and Amman. Dr Ursula Maxeiner was a long-term member of the Association's Executive Management for many years. She died in 2013. Together with his wife, Ernst Maxeiner, who worked mainly in Turkey and India as an international export salesman, was an "ambassador" for the exemplary peace work with children from needy families in the Middle East, both Christian and Muslim. Not a family feast went by that gifts were not requested for the Schneller schools. When it was a matter of urgent renovations for the glass windows rescued from the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem for the Church of Christ in Amman, they financed the trip and stay of an expert who provided the necessary expertise. Their practical imagination and contagious heartiness will remain in cherished memory by the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools and by all those who had the pleasure of meeting the couple.

Prof. Dr Johannes Lähnemann

BECOME A MEMBER OF THE EVS!

IMPRINT

The Evangelische Verein für die Schneller-Schulen e.V. (Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools, EVS) supports and accompanies the work of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon and the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan. Its special task is to offer poor children school education and professional training at the Schneller Schools.

The EVS publications and events provide information about churches and Christians in the Middle East. **The Schneller Magazine is published four times a year and subscription is free.** The EVS Secretariat can recommend speakers on topics regarding the work of the schools.

If you want to become a member of the EVS, we will be glad to send you an application for membership. The annual minimum fee for individuals is Euro 25 and Euro 50 for companies and organisations. By making a donation to the Schneller Schools, you are supporting the work of a recognised charitable welfare.

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We look forward to your support for the work of the Schneller Schools.

Please visit us on the Internet at www.evs-online.org

**Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.**

Jeremia 17, 7 (NRSV)



**EVS Evangelical Association
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