



## Between Orient und Occident

People with „hyphen identity“ tell their stories

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Cover photo: Schoolgirls at JLSS in November 2021 (EVS/Sommer)

Back cover: Anba Bishoy Monastery in the Wadi Natrun in Egypt is one of the oldest monasteries in Christendom. (Katja Buck)

Dear Reader,

People who feel at home in several cultures deal with the question of their own identity in a special way. They have direct access to different worlds and learn in a very natural way about different norms and rules to which they conform, depending on where they are at the time. Sometimes, the hyphenation between their identities is bonding and sometimes, it even represents a challenge – that is, when they do not feel they fully belong to one side or the other. Whatever the case, they have a lot to talk about, especially about the richness of feeling at home in several cultures.



We asked authors who are at home in both the Middle East and the global West about how they deal with their “hyphen identity”. Palestine, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Germany, the Netherlands and the USA are mentioned in a variety of combinations as one of several homelands.

Most readers of this issue can probably only name one culture as their home, but that does not mean we do not have access to other cultures. What we can learn from the authors of this issue is how enriching it is to look at one’s own culture from an outside perspective and compare it to other cultures. The loving way that people with a “hyphen identity” look at both cultures may serve as a model for us. For, in the long run, what is foreign does not have to stay foreign – it can very well become part of one’s own identity. This is a comforting experience, especially in this globalised world.

There is also a lot to report from the Schneller schools this time. And it is rather exciting when well-known Middle East theologians relentlessly confront their own churches, as the authors of the document “We Choose Abundant Life” (see p26) have done.

On behalf of the editorial team, I wish you all an enjoyable read.

Best regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katja Dorothea Buck".

Katja Dorothea Buck

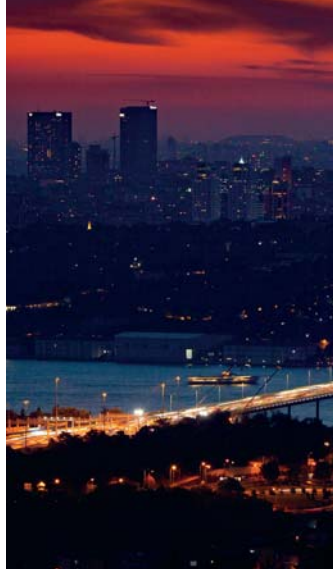
## Being a bridge yourself

**T**he first Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul has spanned Europe and Asia since 1973, the year I was born. One and a half kilometres long, it soars 64 metres above the Bosphorus. For me, it is a beautiful image of my Eurasian origins and a special place. I come from a German-Palestinian/Jordanian family. This is not only a “hyphen”, but even a “hyphen-slash-identity”. My father came to Germany in 1965 at the age of 17 to study after graduating from the Evangelical School in Beit Jala. He met my mother, became a teacher and stayed.

At least once every two years we used to spend our holidays with my father’s family in Jordan. Most of the time we travelled part of the journey by car. But then in the summer of 1974, it was the first time we didn’t have to take the ferry to cross the Bosphorus. Now an impressive six-lane motorway with two footpaths stretches from Europe to Asia! Of course, it was strictly forbidden to stop on the bridge. But despite that, my parents were so fascinated by this impressive structure that they simply stopped the car on the hard shoulder to enjoy the magnificent view. Intuitively, as a one-year-old, I must have sensed that this place had some sort of significance. Of all places, it was here, in the space high up between Europe and Asia, that I took my first steps.

There are people everywhere who are at home in different cultures. Thank God we have now evolved so far in Germany that we can appreciate the value of their intercultural experience. Having a migration background is not a bad thing – in fact, it’s quite the opposite. Germany has become more colourful. And that’s a good thing.

**The Bosphorus Bridge, opened in 1973, at sunset. The skyscrapers are on the European side of Istanbul.**



The Acts of the Apostles already spoke of a woman with a “hyphen identity”: Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth (chapter 16). She bore the name of her home province of Lydia in Asia Minor. „Them, from Lydia...“ – that was the name given to slaves. But perhaps there was also some admiration in using this term: “A Lydian! She comes from where they make the famous cloth!”

If Paul had had a say in the matter, he and his companions would never have met Lydia. Europe was far away and there was a sea in-between, so they preferred to stay in Asia which they were more familiar with. But God’s Spirit guided their path and so they ventured out to the new continent. They sailed by ship via the Mediterranean island of Samothrace to Neapolis (how practical a bridge would have been back then...) and landed in Philippi. In keeping with a tried and tested pattern, Paul sought out the Jewish community and met Lydia there. She felt connected to the one God of Israel. She opened her heart to the Gospel of Jesus and had herself and her whole household baptised. This is how a Lydian-Macedonian woman became a pioneer of Christianity in Europe. Did God choose



Emrah Ayvalli/Pexels

her for this role because, as a woman, she was particularly good at building bridges between cultures? Her hospitality and the openness she showed the three foreign men from the Middle East were priceless to Paul and his cause.

I don't want to embellish or simplify anything: people with "hyphen identities" are no better or worse than others. Multicultural families face their own challenges: there are misunderstandings and conflicts, language barriers, ideological differences, different role models and so on. Many things have to be negotiated and many a tradition has to be remodelled. As a German-Palestinian, I am always stuck on the fence when it comes to taking a position with the Middle East conflict. As a Protestant pastor, it is not easy to assert myself with my Jordanian family which is predominantly Greek Orthodox. But where better than in one's own family to practise such negotiating and bargaining skills that are so necessary in our increasingly pluralistic societies?

What's my most profound intercultural experience? Praying the Lord's Prayer

together with my Orthodox grandmother in the evening before going to sleep, synchronously in Arabic and German, and saying the Amin/Amen at the end at the same time. And I am grateful for the year I was allowed to spend with my aunt in Amman after 10th grade. Finally, I had an excellent opportunity to get to know my family and everyday life in an Arab country. And I finally learnt Arabic, as I unfortunately did not grow up bilingual! Language is such a valuable key to understanding a culture! We know that today and we accept the enormous treasure that children are given when they are brought up in a multilingual environment.

You first have to learn to walk between cultures. But once you have taken the first steps, you can eventually become a bridge yourself. What a great and beautiful task for us "hyphen identities"!

*Nadia El Karsheh is a pastor in a district of Hanover and responsible within her regional church for promoting the participation of Christians with a migration background.*

## “I’ll have a sip of beer just for you”

A conversation about humour, the love for Germany and the Egyptian sun

**Bishop Anba Damian is the official representative of the Coptic Church in Germany. He uses the fact that he stands out in his black habit as an opportunity to talk to people. The 66-year-old, who feels so close to Germany that he would like to be buried here one day, is even familiar with the Swabian “Kehrwoche”\*.**

*You combine different identities in one person: Coptic, Egyptian, German and perhaps others. Which one is predominant?*

None of them. I am a child of God.

*OK, then I’ll rephrase my question. You have lived in Germany for 40 years. Would you describe yourself as a Coptic German or a German Copt?*

My religious and confessional identity is very clear: I am a member and servant of the Coptic Church and I am very grateful for that. I feel very greatly enriched by life in the church. Again, I see it as a privilege that I can and am allowed to live in Germany. I love this country; I love the Germans and I want to be buried here. I have already chosen my burial place in the Brenkhausen Monastery.

*What do you love about Germany?*

I have great respect for this nation, its systematic way of thinking, its honesty,

its clarity in recognising its own limits, its science, its cultivated behaviour. Nowhere in the world do I feel as comfortable as here.

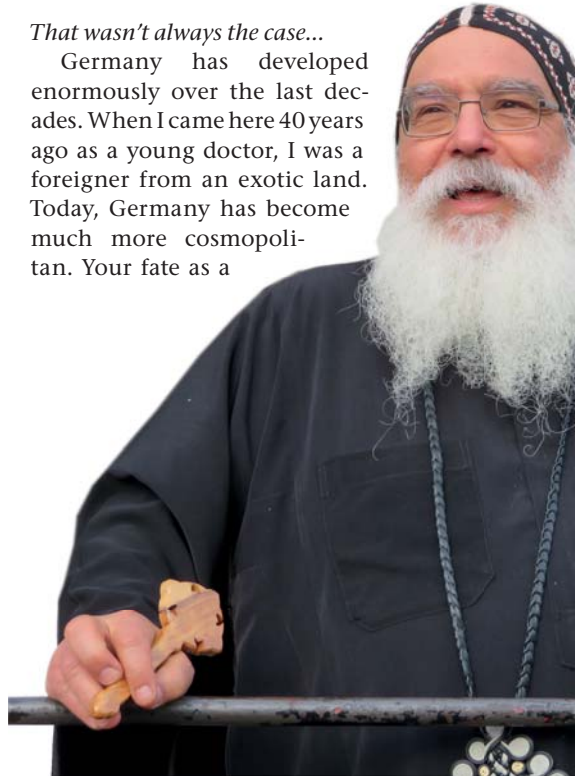
*That’s a very clear declaration. We Germans tend to criticise our country.*

My avowal comes from the heart. What I appreciate most about the Germans is that they don’t know how to make false exaggerations. In my eyes, they have an emotional maturity, they are fair, and help and encourage people to develop their talents.

*That wasn’t always the case...*

Germany has developed enormously over the last decades. When I came here 40 years ago as a young doctor, I was a foreigner from an exotic land. Today, Germany has become much more cosmopolitan. Your fate as a

\* Editor’s note: A custom in the Swabian region of southwest Germany when a household takes turns every Saturday cleaning communal areas in houses or buildings where several households live. There is a big and a small “Kehrwoche”, depending on how much needs to be done.



highly educated people is that you always strive for perfection. That's why you see your own downsides more clearly. What the Germans perhaps lack is a bit of humour.

*But there is more than enough of that in Egypt. People there can laugh at everything and everyone.*

Yes, but you have to understand it correctly. In his time, Pope Shenuda told many jokes during his weekly addresses that were attended by thousands of people. People often laughed uproariously in the cathedral. But he also said: "My laughter is also an expression of my weeping." Humour helps make misery more endurable and it can resolve conflicts. Humour is the style of a people whose level of education is not very high. In my country, 40 per cent of adults are illiterate. Humour helps you explain a lot of things to them. But there is often a lot of wisdom in jokes.

*As a Coptic bishop, you are always conspicuous in Germany. Your clothes*

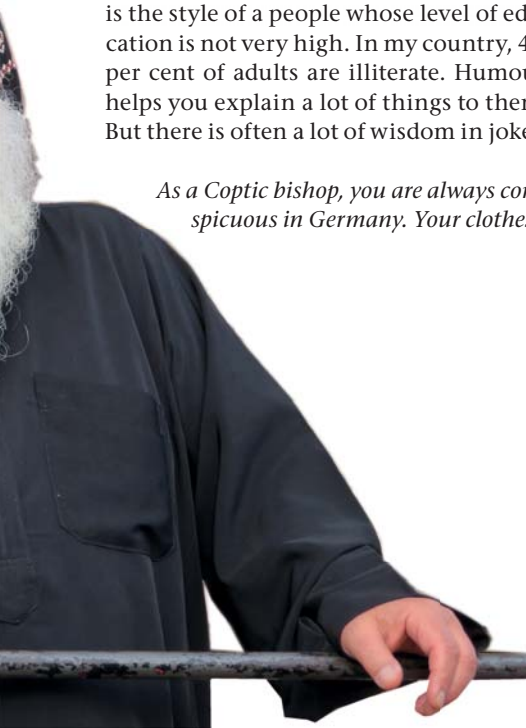
*seem strange to most people. What reactions have you already experienced?*

All sorts of things – I could fill whole books with them. Especially during Advent: some children think I'm Father Christmas. That's why I always have little crosses or chocolates with me so that, when I travel, I can then give away. But some are also unable to cope when they see me. Shortly after 11 September 2001, I was on the train from Stuttgart to Tübingen. A group of young people were sitting in the same carriage and I heard them start to become abusive. They said that Osama Bin Laden was on the train, with such a long beard, and that there was surely a bomb in the suitcase, etc. Suddenly one of them turned to me with a can of beer and said provokingly that I wouldn't drink it. I said in a friendly way that I honestly didn't like beer that much. But I would take a sip just for him. That broke the ice and we had a wonderful conversation all the way to Tübingen. When we got off the train, they

## About

Bishop Anba Damian was born in Cairo in 1955. He lost his father when he was twelve years old. Damian studied medicine in Cairo and went to Germany in 1981, where he first worked in an American military hospital in Stuttgart. Later, he completed his specialist training as a radiologist in Ludwigsburg. In 1988, he became senior consulting physician in Mühlacker (Enzkreis).

In 1991, he went back to Egypt, entered the Anba Bishoy monastery in Wadi Natrun where he was ordained as monk in 1992 and then as priest in 1993. In the same year, he was sent to Germany. In 1995, he was ordained General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Germany. His Episcopal See is the monastery of Brenkhausen near Hötter.



Katja Buck



The monastery of Anba Bishoy, a hundred kilometres west of Cairo, is Bishop Damian's home monastery in Egypt.

insisted on taking a photo with me. They gave me a warm farewell and apologised for their initial reaction.

*Anyone who visits Egypt as a German is amazed at the importance that religion has in people's everyday lives – whether Muslim or Christian. Can you really be a Copt in this secular country of Germany?*

I have a whole congregation of born-and-bred Germans. I could fill a whole church with them.

*Who are these people?*

People who have built up a deep relationship with the Coptic Church. Some were not Christians before; they had no religion. Others grew up in another church. But I'm not interested in recruiting other Christians.

*Why not?*

Because that would destroy ecumenism. The unity of the churches needs the

basis of mutual trust. So, if someone has a problem with his pastor and would like to join us, I try to mediate. Those who want to join us do not have to leave their church because of that.

*So you offer dual church membership, so to speak.*

You could call it that. If someone has been in his church for 40 years, I can't ask him to simply give up this identity in order to be able to celebrate communion with us. You can't make anyone an Orthodox Christian at the push of a button.

*But most of the people in your services have a so-called hyphen identity – they are German-Egyptian or German-Coptic. What kind of counselling questions are you asked then?*

Whatever the context people live in, we are always there for them and try to get close to each individual. We accompany them in all phases of life, visit them at





The monastery of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Mauritius, the bishop's seat, is in Höxter-Brenkhausen near Holzminden.

home, at work or when they are in hospital or in prison. If someone has worries, I can only advise him or her if I know the whole context. As a pastor, I must take that into consideration, otherwise my advice is useless.

*But when people leave their homeland and build a new life in a foreign country and culture, it creates specific problems that cause people to suffer.*

Of course. There are problems with residence permits, with acceptance, with the language or the willingness to learn, with health, education, the relationship to family members in Egypt, or with cleanliness.

*With cleanliness?*

Yes, sure. I'll give you an example. In my first years as a doctor in Germany, I shared a small flat with my sister in Stuttgart. Our mother from Egypt once came to visit us. And when I started doing the big "Kehrwoche" (for explanation see page 4) in the

building one Saturday, she burst into tears. She couldn't understand that her only son, who had made it as far as to become a doctor, was now mopping the stairs for others in Germany. She felt this was demeaning. But in Swabia the "Kehrwoche" is perfectly normal.

*You have lived in Germany for many years. What do you miss?*

I miss the sun. The older I get, the more I notice the effects it has on my health.

*And when you are in Egypt, what do you miss?*

Quite a lot. First of all, my friends. But also dignity, freedom, order, discipline, clean tap water, fresh air, the lush green of nature, quietness, walks in the forest. And I miss by bike. In Egypt, I could never ride my bike without being laughed at.

*Katja Dorothea Buck conducted the interview.*

## Thinking from the other person's perspective

An oriental-western believer between Jerusalem and Bethany

Anyone who, like Diet Koster, comes from the Netherlands, who has lived in the Holy Land for half a century, has become part of the German Protestant congregation in Jerusalem, who has Mennonite roots and is also integrated into a large Muslim family clan, has to find his or her very own answer to the big question “who am I?”

In Arabic, the word for identity is “hou-wiya”. Whoever asks for it, however, usually means “proof of identity” which contains your name, address and country of birth – and the most important thing: your “number”. This number is used to register you with all authorities, including your place of residence, social security and health insurance. But who I really am is much more than the information on this card. And I am definitely not a number!

Yes, I certainly have several “me’s”, several identities! I am Dutch by birth and I have worked as a volunteer educator for more than 35 years for a Swiss NGO in a Palestinian boys’ home. I have lived in Bethany and Jerusalem for 51 years. I am a “teta”, or grandmother, to more than 80 grandchildren in a large Muslim family clan. And from the beginning of my time in Jerusalem, I have been part of the German-speaking Protestant community, so my friends were and are mostly German!

It makes a difference whether you live or work in a foreign country for some time, maybe even a few years – which is certainly exciting, interesting and instructive – or whether you get involved with



The author with “maqlube”, an Arabic rice dish that is not easy to cook, but it’s always a success ...

a country, its language and culture with long-term intentions. It doesn’t just rub off on you. It changes you from the inside out, at least if life is supposed to bring joy and meaning. Then you put down roots next to the roots of your upbringing, but without quite belonging to them completely. The feeling of sitting in between, of being and feeling, of never quite belonging, is somehow always there. And then again, sometimes I think I just know and feel: this is where I belong; this has already become a part of me; this is me. The language has helped me a lot, although both German and Arabic were foreign languages for me. Now I think in German and speak Arabic most of the time.

There are enormous differences between western and oriental cultures. Sometimes, it is not easy to remember the words and social forms I should use with “the Germans” or with “the Palestinians”.



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... and on the other side of the “Green Line” with one of her 80 granddaughters of the Muslim family clan.

I still make “mistakes”, for example, in dealing with the sense of time, punctuality, openness and reliability, traditions or hierarchies. To give concrete examples of this would go beyond the limits here. Too many details would have to be explained in order to understand them. You have to learn to think from the other person’s perspective.

When I cross the checkpoint to get from Bethany to Jerusalem or vice versa (there is a wall in between), I often have the feeling that I am slipping – more unconsciously than consciously – into another identity. This became particularly clear to me dur-

ing Covid-19 when the Israelis, Germans and Palestinians had totally different ways of dealing with the pandemic. Sometimes, I didn’t behave “properly” because there were so many different expectations and sometimes, I didn’t know quickly enough which hyphen now applies or which identity I now have to assume.

When I was asked to write this article, the question was: are you a German-Palestinian-Mennonite Dutchwoman or a Dutch-Palestinian-German Mennonite? The concept was new to me. Yes, I am a Mennonite, consciously baptised when I was an adult. But now here in Jerusalem, I am part of the German-speaking Protestant congregation and therefore part of the small ecumenical Christianity in Jerusalem (one percent!). Over the many years, this has enriched me with much that is spiritual and new. But some “typical” characteristics of a Dutch Mennonite (the value of community, doing things, being anti-hierarchical and being different) still seem to shine through. Nonetheless, I would call myself a “Christian” rather than a Mennonite.

My “children” and their families, my neighbours and the people I live with are Muslims. This has also made me appreciate many things that are new, unknown and different. And some of it I have also integrated into my own faith. So, I would rather formulate my hyphens like this: I feel like an “oriental-western believer”. But I would prefer to answer by quoting Bonhoeffer on the question of what or who I am, who or how I (have) become: “Thou knowest, O God, I am thine!”

*Diet Koster*

## Not blue, not red, simply purple

Thoughts of a Dutch-Lebanese young woman on the question of her identity

**“I have a hyphen nationality, but not a hyphen identity,” says Christina van Saane from Beirut. Her mother comes from Lebanon, her father from the Netherlands. The young woman has lived in both countries for a long time. And although something is always missing, both countries have become her home.**

When I have to introduce myself, I usually say: “My name is Christina and I am a Dutch Lebanese.” If this answer causes confusion, I add that my mother is Lebanese and my father is Dutch, and that we have lived in both countries. “But do you feel more Dutch or more Lebanese?” or “which passport do you have?” are usually the questions that follow. For people who grew up in a monocultural environment, cultural identity (and identity in general) is a very straightforward concept. They were born in the place where they grew up, their family is all in one place; their job and their hobbies are all concentrated inside their country’s borders together with people who are like them.

Having lived in both countries, I had a front row seat to how wildly different the Dutch and Lebanese cultures are. And each time I immerse myself into one, I’ve had to relearn which of my traits belong to which culture. Whenever we’re in the Netherlands I have to remember that I can’t tell someone I’ll be there in 5 minutes and knock on their door 30 minutes later. In the same way that I have to remember not to be too direct and outspoken when it comes to opinions in Lebanon.

No matter how conscious I am of acceptable traits and habits, I’m still always missing something. Whether it’s the fact that I am more fluent in English than either my mother or father tongue, or that I never grew up with the same habits and traditions as my friends. I’ll never know what it’s like to get a job at the local Dutch supermarket at 15 and have to mix working hours with study hours. I’ll also never know what it’s like to spend all my early summers in a Lebanese mountain house that’s been in the family for generations, running around with my 500 cousins. Though I’ve come to terms with missing out on these experiences, it still leaves me alienated from the communities and remains an obstacle when I try to connect with others.

I always used to say I grew up on airplanes. Almost every vacation I’d be on an airplane going to visit family, either from the Netherlands to Lebanon, or the other way around. Whether I’m touching down at Schiphol airport or Rafik Hariri international airport, it feels like coming home after a long and tiring day. But, in both cases, I’m always missing people. In Lebanon, I can’t quickly bike over to my Opa and Oma for a cup of coffee after school. And in Holland, I can’t spend the day preparing food for an elaborate Sunday lunch with my grandma’s entire family. No matter what, I’m always missing a part of me.

On airplanes, I’m missing both my homes at the same time. Sometimes, though, my two worlds collide. When family comes to visit, or when I meet a Dutch person in Lebanon and we can speak



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the language. These moments are rare, though, but help me really appreciate and enjoy reconnecting with my homes.

“Identity cannot be compartmentalized; it cannot be split in halves or thirds, nor have any clearly defined set of boundaries. I do not have several identities, I only have one, made of all the elements that have shaped its unique proportions.” This quote from Amin Maalouf has really helped me personally when it came to discovering how my origins influenced my identity. I’ve always hated the question, “which side do you feel more connected to?” It doesn’t change the fact that my identity is and always will be a mix. It’s not 30% blue and 70% red, it’s purple, very simply. My identity is who I am, and I like to think that the fact that my parents are from different countries just makes it a little more varied than the average person. So, to me, I only have a hyphen nationality, not a hyphen identity.

That said, I am eternally grateful to live with a hyphen. My life experiences have been more varied, and having lived with two very different cultures has given me a more holistic and sensitive look on life. And although having two homes is hard, I always have somewhere to go and family to reunite with.

*Christina van Saane*

The author in the Lebanese mountains

## “Are you a Lebam or an Amleb?”

A former Schneller student has lived in the USA for 58 years.

Years ago, I was interviewed by the then president of the largest lumber company in the United States. “Are you a Lebam or an Amleb?” I was not sure what he was asking me until he clarified, “Are you a Lebanese American or an American Lebanese?”

I said, “I am a Lebam. I was born in Lebanon. I have two passports, an expired Lebanese and a valid US passport.” Thus, the hyphen-identity. I was born in Lebanon in 1942. My father died when I was 10 years old. Then, I had no idea who I was. Looking back, I identified with the French. At that time, it was customary in Lebanon to greet each other with “Bonjour”, “Bonsoir” and say thank you with “Merci”. As I got older, I asked myself what is wrong with the Arabic greetings? “Marhaba”, “Kifak”, and “Shukran”? That became part of my Lebanese identity. When I was at the Schneller School, “Guten Morgen Fraeulein Maria” and “Guten Tag Bruder Aden” were the greetings I used. At the Schneller School, the German identity took over. Other than greetings, discipline was the order of the day. The Bruder would gesture with noise by his mouth which meant don’t make noise while eating and he would wake us up with “Aufstehen” and “Bett machen”.

I arrived in the United States in 1962 at the age of 22 and began studying business administration. On my first day at College in Glendale, California, I learned that at exactly 8:00 am every student stands still,



looks in the same direction, places their right hand on their heart and pledges allegiance to the flag of the United States and what it stands for. I did not know what was going on. The same ritual was repeated every morning as I stood still, looked in the same direction and recited with everyone the whole version. This was the start of my American Identity.

The transformation of identity from Lebanese to American was gradual. In Lebanon you use a fork and a knife while eating, but that is not the case with a delicious hamburger in the USA. You dig into it with your fingers after drenching it with Ketchup. In the US, there always seems to be some kind of association between hamburgers and French fries and pizza and



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**Aziz Shalaby as a teenager (in the black and white picture on the right) at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School and six decades later on the US Pacific coast.**

beer. Also in the US, names are always shortened: My friend Joseph tells me to call him Joe. When I went to enroll for college, the counselor asked me what my name was. I said, "Aziz." She asked what my middle name was and I said "Boulos". She said, "From now on we will call you Bill." I am now known as Aziz in Lebanon, as Bill in the US and many other names such as William, Guillermo, and Billy!

As I am approaching the eighth decade of my life, I am reflecting on my hyphen identity. All I can say about my Lebanese side is that I rarely speak Arabic, my native language. I read Arabic books and daily newspapers and enjoy Arabic classical songs by Egyptian and folkloric songs by Lebanese singers. I love Lebanese food, es-

pecially the Kibbee (filled fried meatballs) and even better Nayé, which is Arabian tartar! I keep in contact and support the Schneller School, my Alma Mater. I and a school mate make sure that the students have shoes all year long. I financially support my immediate family and friends during these difficult times in Lebanon. I visit Lebanon often.

About my American side, I think in English. I read English books. I watch TV for the news and entertainment. I love all the types of food that the US offers, including American, Chinese, Mexican, Japanese, Italian, and many others. I belong to the Lions Club and volunteer in helping homeless and disadvantaged school children. I am the Treasurer of the Lutheran Board for Mission Support, an organization that supports needy students in Lebanon and Syria, with the emphasis on the Schneller Institutes in Lebanon and Jordan.

It is difficult at my age to ask about my own identity. But it's also great fun to remember all the things that have shaped me.

*Aziz Shalaby lives in Vancouver im US-State Washington.*

## And the longing is always there

About people who (have to) commute between worlds

**At international hubs like Frankfurt Airport, there are many travellers who have more than one home. Because fewer people are currently flying on business or on holiday due to the Covid-19 pandemic, they are now more conspicuous than ever. They accept the hurdles of intercontinental flights to see family and relatives again or to say goodbye to a loved one.**

The woman is desperate: “They’re at home!” she tells me, referring to the PCR test results for her ten-year-old twins. They had all arrived from Beirut that morning and were on their way to Canada. The mother, a Lebanese Canadian, had picked up her five children after two years in Lebanon to take them to their “real” home. They were all born in Canada. But what would the children say where their home actually is? We didn’t have time to talk about it at that moment. I had met the desperate woman during my usual tour of the transit lounge at Frankfurt Airport. A PCR test there costs a good 250 euros. She had just learned that and now the world and all flight plans seemed to collapse. New tests for two children were too expensive. What’s more, it would have meant that they could only fly the next day. I encouraged her to use my mobile phone to call neighbours in the small Lebanese village. Maybe someone could go to the flat and send photos of the tests.

While we waited and the children headed for the fast-food restaurant with a volunteer, the mother began to tell the story. She had been living in Canada with her husband for a little over 15 years. The be-

ginning was hard. Now they are happy to be there. But the longing for Lebanon still remained. They wanted the children to know where their parents came from, where their roots were. And they should learn Arabic properly. That is why the parents had sent their five children to Lebanon for a school year. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, this turned into two years.

Many people like this family are currently passing through Frankfurt Airport. “It’s as if the Covid-19 pandemic has raised



The volunteer airport chaplains are easily recognisable by



the curtain and now all the people who have more than one home have become visible all at once.” This is how a volunteer from the Protestant airport chaplaincy recently described what we have been experiencing here every day since March 2020. People who are passing through despite all the hurdles for intercontinental travel. Before, they didn’t stand out so much among the many business travellers and holidaymakers. Now they are mainly the ones who take the risk of “travelling” in these times. Sometimes in a hurry because a loved one has died. Sometimes planned in order to finally marry within the family circle. Or worried and afraid because of an accident or a serious illness.

In November 2020, I met a young woman, born in the USA, with family roots in Kenya. Her older brother had been shot dead by police in the US in July 2020. The grandparents in Kenya were very worried about their grandchildren, whom they saw in danger in a country where police so often kill African-American people. The young woman wanted to visit her grandparents. To stand by them – on behalf of the family. To grieve with them. And then the expired Covid test in Frankfurt stopped her before her onward flight to Nairobi. The family mobilised a distant relative in Germany who drove over 200 kilometres to the airport to give her the necessary money for a new test. That’s how important this trip was to all of them together!

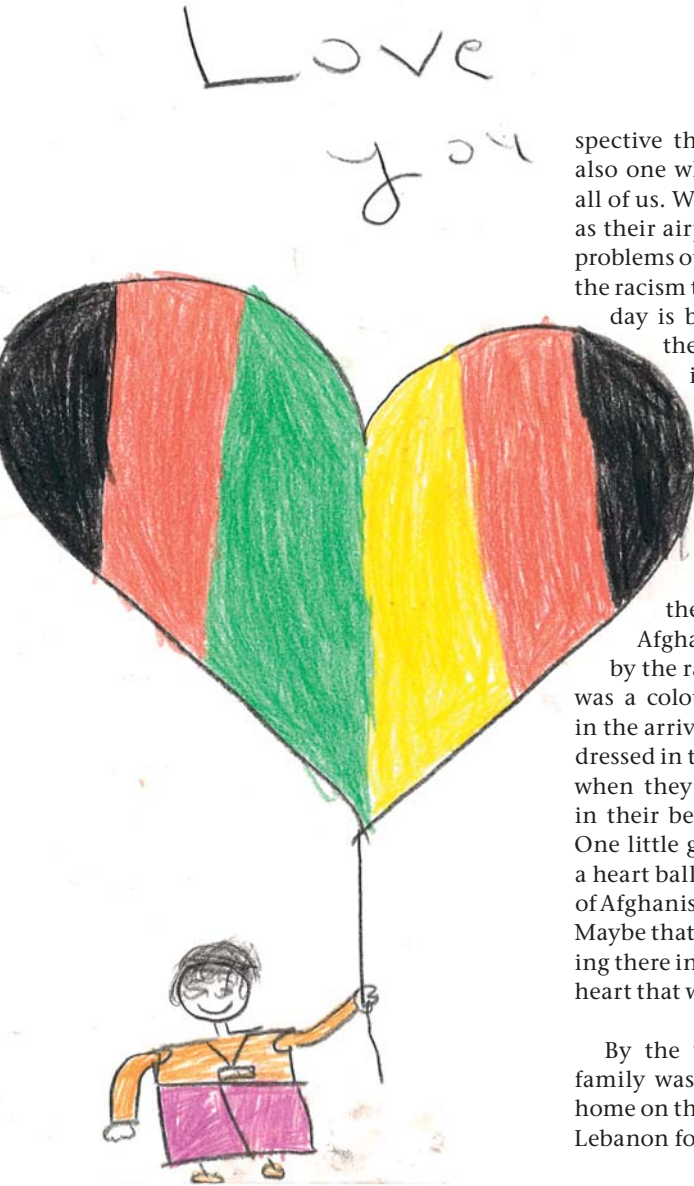


Klünemann

Fortunately, these multinational passengers meet airport staff who know exactly what this kind of life is like. Many have also grown up this way, with roots in several countries, cultures, languages and religions. With the advantages and the difficulties that all this brings. Carrying two, sometimes three hearts “in their chest” and always living with a deep longing. Perhaps the hub airport is exactly the right workplace for people like them. As an airport pastor, I have already organised funeral services where family members and friends prayed together at the same time in the airport chapel as well as somewhere far away, and remembered their deceased – connected by just a mobile phone. Or couples were married and the family in South America also joined in by video call.

As an airport member of staff, people from multinational families are a great treasure because of their language skills and ability to quickly build trust in contact with passengers. They bring a per-

their high-visibility yellow jackets.



Painting of a thank-you by an Afghan girl to the author

spective that is needed in this job, but also one which would often be good for all of us. When co-workers ask my advice as their airport pastor, it is usually about problems outside the airport. For example, the racism that children experience every day is becoming unbearable, or that the already tight housing market is even harder for people with a different skin colour.

When the planes with the evacuees from Kabul landed in Frankfurt in August 2021, there were quite a few European-Afghan families among them who had visited relatives in Afghanistan and had been surprised by the rapid advance of the Taliban. It was a colourful confusion of languages in the arrival lounges. Most of them were dressed in traditional Afghan clothes. But when they approached me, some spoke in their best Bavarian or Swiss German. One little girl drew a picture of me with a heart balloon in the colours of the flags of Afghanistan and Germany to thank me. Maybe that's it: it's not several hearts beating there in one person, but one colourful heart that wants to be light and carefree.

By the way, the Lebanese-Canadian family was able to fly on to their other home on the same day. The neighbours in Lebanon found the PCR test results.

*Rev. Bettina Klünemann is a chaplain at Frankfurt Airport and spent some months in Beirut for studying at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in autumn 2021.*

# Roots in a foreign soil

When you can no longer decide on a homeland

She has carefully put down roots in Syria over the decades. Today, when she comes to Germany for a few months, she always lives “with Syria”. Gabriele Conrad-Hamzé says she has lost the feeling of belonging exclusively to her country of birth. She is probably the classic example of “hyphen integration”.

**F**ar more than half of my life I spent outside my country of origin, where I attended school and training at the time and worked for some time in the public sector as a social worker. I first went to Algeria with my husband, who is from Syria, where he worked as a mechanical engineer for a few years. We liked living in that country. I felt comfortable, immersed in a mixture of Algerian, Syrian, German and French cultures.

But our destination remained Syria. I was warmly welcomed by my husband’s family in the south of the country and I quickly became integrated. The focus of our lives at that time was Damascus, where I worked for 20 years as a translator and an assistant in the administration of the German Archaeological Institute (DAI), while my husband worked for various German companies in Syria. Despite numerous foreign scientists, the work at the DAI took place almost exclusively in a German-speaking setting. I owe this institute my extensive knowledge of antiquity, archaeological sites, world cultures, their civilisations and the history of ancient peoples. Syria, a theatre of world history. What a fascination this country held for me!

Martina Waiblinger



Shafiq Hamzé and Gabriele Conrad-Hamzé

But there were also many déjà vu experiences, a feeling of the already experienced, the familiar. For example, a pastor from the German Protestant congregation in Beirut came to Damascus every month. The service was celebrated in the convent of the Franciscan nuns. Afterwards, people exchanged views in a contemplative but also cheerful group. Germans living in Damascus took part, mainly women, as well as embassy staff and Muslims close to the German circle.

Germany was suddenly so close again. They exchanged experiences, but I could not share all of them. There were pleasant, often funny things in interpersonal relationships, sometimes caused by language-related misunderstandings, sometimes by cultural “awkward amazement”. In addition, I heard revealing observations about social interactions, but also things that I had difficulty understanding or



private(2)

Since 2016, the Hamzé's have looked after the children of families who have fled from the north of Syria to the south of the country. Their care includes for example fixed meals and morning gymnastics.

grasping within the oriental, social and religious context which was mainly influenced by foreign customs.

Not everyone felt integrated. Others, like me, accepted foreignness and the unfamiliar into their lives. And without being aware of it, they cautiously put down roots in this foreign soil over the years. Our annual visits to Germany did not make us feel too far away. But still, a wavering ambivalence had developed over the years. For many years, a circle of around 30 German-speaking women had supported Syrians in need from the proceeds of selling home-made produce at the Christmas bazaar. This gave me additional insights into layers of society that I would otherwise not have had.

But then, in 2011, the war came completely unexpectedly. On the recommendation of the German Embassy, almost all



the women and other Germans living in Syria left the country. But we stayed. In the beginning, we still had a well-functioning environmental club for children and young people on a plantation with our large, ecologically built house near Soueida. In August 2013, however, the Nusra Front came and destroyed the plantation and our house.

We still stayed. In 2016, with the help of German friends and socially committed people, we began to look after illiterate refugee children whose families had fled from the north to the south. We also helped students and families who had



been reduced to poverty. We could not and would not leave all that behind. I once felt so well received, like an integral part of the population.

But the economic decline and its marauding gangs made themselves increasingly felt. Today, very many people face great problems, up to and including hunger. This gradual advance of this catastrophe and the sword of Damocles constantly hovering over our heads finally led us, too, to consider leaving the country for good since we own a small flat in Munich. But immediately the big question arose: where is my home? Where are my roots? Which

country can give me the guarantee to live a happy life? Am I more attached to Syria than to my country of origin, Germany? If the worst came to the worst, which country would I definitely choose without the possibility of returning? Only by answering this question can I gain clarity.

I am torn by ambivalent feelings. But leaving my “host country” without returning would be a painful act which would be hard to bear. I would die a hundred deaths a day just thinking about how the people there are doing and what kind of hardships they are suffering in this fatal and dramatic situation. So, the question is actually decided. I am still a German here in Syria, this jewel among the Arab countries of the Middle East with its many ethnic groups and religious, respected and state-protected minorities. Christmas and Easter are legally protected holidays here, and the state accommodates the Christian churches in many ways, providing them with free electricity, for example.

In Germany, I always live “with Syria”. I have lost the exclusive feeling of belonging to my country of birth alone. So, I basically draw comparisons in almost all areas. Germany doesn’t always come off well. I am probably the classic example of “hyphen integration”.

*Gabriele Conrad-Hamzé is originally from Munich and has lived in Syria for decades, first in Damascus and now in Soueida in the south of the country.*

## A hyphen – what does it mean?

Multi-faceted identities in a German-Iranian family

We are a German-Iranian family with a passion for football. My children grew up bilingual, bicultural and interreligious. Sabine Soltani wonders whether this is a good thing or more of a difficulty.

Today I can safely say: it was all worth it and it is an enrichment. I notice it especially with football – there are actually two hearts beating in our breasts and we follow the games of the Iranian national team with the same fervour as those of the German team. We sing the national anthems and put our hands on our hearts. We cheer during the match and pray for a winning goal. Even Germans who visit us while the Iranian team is playing are infected and become as excited as we are, swear at the referee for every gaffe and wildly celebrate a win with us. Likewise, they share with us the disappointment when Iran loses, just as if the German team had lost.

I don't know how we would feel if both teams played each other again in an im-

portant tournament. The hyphen – there it is again: Germany – Iran. One laughing eye and one crying eye would probably be all that is left and the hyphen would then join them together again.

But what are we really? German fans of the Iranian team? German Iranians or Iranian Germans? German-Iranians? Catholic Muslims or Islamic Catholics? Islam-Catholics? How many multi-faceted identities can there be in such families! I am happy to have the chance to live exactly the way we do. This always gives me a glimpse of the “other”. It is nice that my children have learned so much for themselves and can look beyond borders. They define both as home and are homesick for the other country, no matter where they are. And even I, as a “German”, like to visit Iran again and again and feel at home there, too. The hyphen creates a connection. The hyphen opens up something that I would otherwise have missed.

*Sabine Soltani lived in Tehran for many years. Today she lives in Bavaria.*



The SCHNELLER Magazine with its German and English editions is available in the digital magazine portal "Missionspresse" of the Evangelical Mission Worldwide (EMW). Magazines from mission agencies in Germany are posted at [www.missionspresse.org](http://www.missionspresse.org)

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# A tribute to the Schneller work

Dazzling and complicated are terms you can use to describe the book that former Schneller student Naser Dahdal has written about his time at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS). The book is as colourful and complex as multiple identities can be. In this case, the author brings a Palestinian-Lebanese-Swiss identity to which one can confidently ascribe the umbrella identity of “Schneller”.

Born in Palestine in 1948, raised as a refugee in poor conditions, first in Syria, then in Lebanon, Dahdal came to JLSS in Khirbet Kanafar at the age of nine, where his aunt called Sit Rifka, worked as a cook. After graduating from high school, Dahdal studied English and religion in Bei-

rut, then went to Erlangen in Germany in 1973 where he studied theology and Arabic philology and gained his doctorate. From 1980 to 1982, he taught at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut but had to leave Lebanon due to the war and went to Switzerland, where he still lives today.

man (prose) and in Arabic (poems). In addition to purely biographical parts, he weaves in artful poems of praise in classical High Arabic about people without whom the Schneller work would not exist and who shaped him during his time at the boarding home. For example, he writes an ode reminiscent of an ancient heroic epic about Johann Ludwig Schneller, who laid the foundation stone in Jerusalem in 1860. But he also pays tribute to (deceased) classmates with his linguistic art.

Textually, there is another level, namely the footnotes, some of which are very detailed. In them, Dahdal explains little-used terms from High Arabic, explains allusions, gives references to biblical passages and also provides background information on the linguistic images he uses in his poems. This complexity is a challenge to the reader.

Some may dismiss Dahdal’s eulogies as effusiveness. But they should be taken as they are intended – as an attempt to express the infinite gratitude felt by someone whose stars were anything but favourable at birth, but who, looking back on his own life, is amazed to realise how much he owes to others. The short book is certainly a tribute to the Schneller work.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*



Naser Dahdal  
**Schneller: Legende und Epos**  
Vater, Sohn und Enkel  
Public Book Media Verlag  
Frankfurt 2016  
148 Seiten, 14,80 Euro

If you want to discover the hidden wealth in this book, you should know a little Arabic. Dahdal writes about his childhood and youth at the JLSS in Ger-

## Get fresh air in the schoolyard!

EMS/Sommer



Corona walk in the schoolyard. Anyone who can't touch the person in front of him knows that the distance is sufficient.

**Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS).** In view of the Corona pandemic, a strict hygiene concept is in place at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. Everyone who comes to the school from the outside has the temperature taken at the entrance. Even mild symptoms of illness must be accompanied by a negative PCR test before anyone is allowed coming back into the school. Wearing masks and keeping your distance is the order of the day. Classrooms and other common areas are cleaned and disinfected regularly.

Much is similar to what applies at German schools. But at JLSS, all students are also required to leave the classroom after every second lesson and go for a five-minute walk with their teacher in the schoolyard, observing the distance rules. In this way, the children not only get regular fresh air, but the classrooms can also be generously aired during this time. Thus, the first half of the school year could take place relatively smoothly. Only in No-

vember did the school have to close for a week because an instructor in the workshops had carelessly come to work sick and infected a colleague. "We hope everyone understands the importance of following prevention measures at home and at school. The students desperately need a normal school year without interruptions," says Director George Haddad.

The education of the children, who have lost almost two years, must have priority now, he said. All the festivals and big events where many people traditionally come together could wait until the big vacations in the summer. "We can't have a whole generation disadvantaged for life because they didn't get a proper education when they were young," Haddad says.

## High-ranking visitor at the Schneller School

**Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS).** At the end of November, the German ambassador to Lebanon, Andreas Kindl, visited the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS). For the diplomat it was not the first time. He likes to inform himself about the latest projects, like this time, for example, the photovoltaic plant and the new carpentry hangar.

He pledged his support to the school in matters of international cooperation with





Ambassador Andreas Kindl (right) having breakfast in the dining room at JLSS with Laure Haddad, Uwe Gräbe and George Haddad..

regard to training courses (also for Syrian young people) as well as with regard to the recognition of qualifications. The kitchen of the JLSS had prepared a wonderful meal on the occasion of the high visit.

In a cozy atmosphere, the conversations continued in the directors' house and clearly exceeded the time frame that the ambassador had actually set for himself.

## Music to become a permanent part of the curriculum



Rehearsal for the Christmas performance.

**Amman (TSS/EVS).** Thanks to generous support from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg, students at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman have been receiving regular music lessons since the start of the school year. The church has placed 26,500 euros at the school's disposal for this purpose. Several instruments were purchased and a separate music room was set up. The school can also use the donation to pay the salary

of a music teacher for two years. After that, it is planned to make the position a regular part of the school's budget.

The benefits this had had on lessons at the TSS were already evident at the Christmas performance last year. The young teacher had rehearsed a small programme consisting of a variety of (Christmas) songs with a large number of children and young adults.

## 7th SiMO Consultation on Public Theology in Beirut

**Stuttgart/Beirut (EMS/NEST).** For the seventh time, the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut and the scholarship programme Studies in the Middle East (SiMO) of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) has sent out invitations to an international consultation. This year, from 20 to 22 April in Beirut, the theme will be “Public Theology – Current Challenges in the Middle East and in Europe”. Public theology is generally understood to mean reflection on theologically based contributions to public discourse and also on the relationship between religious communities and the (secular) public.

In Lebanon, this question has been hotly debated for some time. In the face of the collapse of the political and economic system, the churches there have to ask themselves whether they were right in the way they took a public position as confessional communities in the past. But the question of how they should speak in future is also

open. However, the churches in Europe are also facing similar challenges, for example how to position themselves in view of the heterogeneous discourses on how to deal with the pandemic or the climate crisis. Among the speakers is the Lebanese theologian Najla Kassab, who is currently President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC).

In contrast to previous conferences, which take place every three years and alternate between Germany and Lebanon, the number of participants this year is very limited. Due to the pandemic and also the economic and political crisis in Lebanon, only 15 people will be able to attend in person at any time.

For further information, please contact the Middle East Liaison Desk of the EMS by e-mail ([graebe@ems-online.org](mailto:graebe@ems-online.org)) or call +49 (0)711 63678-37

## Plenty of space for carpentry training!



EMS/Gräbe

shop for the carpentry apprentices. Classrooms for the vocational students will be set up on the upper floor. The old carpentry workshop had to be closed two years ago because massive settlement cracks were endangering the overall statics of the building. In the meantime, the carpentry apprentices were trained in the school auditorium.

**Khirbet Kanafar (JLSS).** The new two-story building on the edge of the school campus will soon house the training work-

The new building was financed by the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) and the Schneller Foundation.

# “Good night, Miss Katrin, sleep well!”

Alumni reminisce

**Katrin Kaltenecker (33) was a volunteer in a residential group at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in 2007/2008. Today she is a doctor and lives near Stuttgart.**



When I think of my time in Jordan, many impressions suddenly flash before my inner eye. But to this day, I always thought it was particularly touching how our bedtime routine came about.

In the beginning, it was impossible for me to control my 20 high-spirited boys when they had to go to bed. After a few evenings that I started to sit by each boy's bedside for a minute or two, just giving



privat

Katrin Kaltenecker almost 15 years ago with children at the TSS.

him my attention and wishing him a good night, one of my boys replied in German: “Good night, Miss Katrin, sleep well!” He, who didn't know a word of German, had asked his German teacher for this phrase to thank me. From that moment on, the phrase was a permanent part of our good-night ritual.

The boys in my group were ten or eleven years old at the time. It would be incredibly great to see one or two of them again and to find out what happened to them. There was Amar, for example, a shy boy with a tragic family history, but nevertheless a really clever little guy. Or Samer and his little brother, Iraqi refugees waiting for a visa to Australia, where part of their family had already found asylum.

I still feel connected to the Schneller work after so many years. The Schneller concept of education for peace, respect and tolerance is timeless and important. I had the privilege of making my small contribution to it. But even more than that, the time in Jordan and the work at the TSS has shaped me as a person, in my actions and my way of thinking.

I would give three pieces of advice to people who are thinking about doing voluntary service: Do it! But don't try to stick to your plans and ideas or you will quickly become disillusioned. Be open to everything that comes and happens, then you will have a great time. And, after every low comes a high! My advice to the dear parents: from the outside and from a distance, everything looks different and is usually worse than it really is there. So, stay calm and drink tea – that's what the Jordanians do! Because, insha'allah (God willing), everything will turn out to be just fine!



## “Doublespeak, hierarchical, unrealistic”

Middle Eastern theologians sharply criticise their own churches

**Ten years of Arab Spring, ten years of war in Syria. Eleven theologians from Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine analyse the situation of Christians in the Middle East and address things in a discussion paper that are otherwise only spoken about in private. At the centre of the criticism are the churches themselves.**

Actually, the text, which was published last autumn under the title “We Choose Abundant Life”, should have been an official Kairos document of the churches in the Middle East. And the churches had already begun their internal self-analysis three years ago under the leadership of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). The MECC, which has its headquarters in Beirut, had invited a broad group of lay people and experts from theology, social and political sciences to several workshops.

But then, the meeting was placed on hold due to the uprisings and the beginning economic crisis in Lebanon. At the same time, there were some personnel changes within the MECC. The fact that the paper was “only” published by eleven theologians from Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine on their own initiative and not as an official Kairos document should not diminish its impact. For among the authors are some with good connections to the worldwide ecumenical community, including Najla Kassab, President of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the internationally known theologian Mitri Raheb from Bethlehem, Michel Nseir, Programme Executive for

the World Council of Churches, (WCC), and Roupheal Zgheib, National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) of Lebanon.

When it comes to content, the paper benefited from the fact that the authors were able to formulate their views free of loyalty constraints. For example, they unsparingly criticise the “doublespeak” of some church leaders who “exaggerate the suffering of Christians” to “some American and European Christian groups”, and “promote the theory of systematic persecution by Muslims”. But when they speak to Muslims, they talk about good coexistence and promote the protection of Christian communities.

The authors give a lot of attention to the confrontation with Islam. Most Christians in the Middle East, however, believe today that this “must be driven by the principles of togetherness, rapprochement and brotherhood/sisterhood”. Religiously motivated violence is by no means something that can only be associated with Islam. Violence is neither inherent in Islam, nor in political Islam, nor is it exclusively restricted to religions. Rather, violence is “an anthropological and social phenomenon, often linked to a closed, exclusive, and arrogant discourse about identity”.

The authors do not spare criticism of the churches either. They denounce the fact that women and young people are involved far too little. Large sections of the youth are no longer addressed. Instead, monologue prevails over dialogue. The Church often repeats a form of language



Christians are part of an ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that has shaped the Middle East for millennia.

“that does not respond to the major crises faced by the youth”. It is noticeable that “youth often feel alienated in the Churches to which they belong”. The Churches also lack prophetic courage and are unwilling to speak truth to the leaders in power. “They keep silent or turn a blind eye to practices that infringe on human freedom and dignity.”

It is interesting that the authors vehemently reject the concept of minority. Rather, Christians are an original part of an ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that has shaped the Middle East for millennia. Christians are not a minority that has to distinguish itself from a majority. The problem is that after the fall of the Ottoman Empire a hundred years ago, it was not possible to establish civil states under the rule of law in which all citizens have the same rights. Religious, ethnic and clan affinities continue to dominate and

are the breeding ground for conflicts and religious fanaticism. This plays a devastating role in the entire region, which is why many Christians feel threatened in their existence. It is a fatal mistake, however, to persist in the logic of the religiously or ethnically defined minority, which can only protect itself if it either seeks solidarity with other minorities or submits to an authoritarian regime without criticism.

It is not surprising that the churches in the Middle East have not officially reacted to the paper so far. However, it will be interesting to see whether the theses of this important document can be discussed with a broader public in the Middle East and with partners abroad.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

The document can be downloaded at  
[www.wechooseabundantlife.com](http://www.wechooseabundantlife.com)

**Response to Schneller Magazine 4/2021**

I have just read the new issue of Schneller Magazine. Thank you very much for this exciting read! Congratulations on such a successful issue!

*Rev. Dr Hans-Christoph Gossmann,  
Hamburg*



Once again, I would like to express my appreciation for the current Schneller Magazine in which you courageously tackle an explosive and necessary topic. It features a lot of tireless and courageous commitment and a longing for solutions, which unfortunately are nowhere to be seen at present. I was also pleased with the detailed tribute to Klaus Schmid.

*Prof. Dr Johannes Lähnemann, Goslar*

I liked the latest Schneller Magazine very much with its questions and the variety of different positions!

*Dr Martin Repp, Frankfurt*

Once again you have succeeded in producing such an interesting magazine. I would like to pass on three more copies to others and would appreciate it if you could send them to me.

*Jutta Weiss, Flensburg*

As a supporter of the Schneller Schools and a subscriber to the magazine, I was pleased to see the cover picture and expected to receive the latest information on Tent of Nations. Unfortunately, that was not the case! Are you not allowed to say anything critical about Israel, because then you would be suspected of being critical of Israel or even anti-Semitic? But Christian papers should not hide the truth and certainly not when Christians suffer from

it. Did you do anything to support the Tent of Nations after the „raid“ and protest against the military action? You cannot celebrate Christmas peacefully if people in Bethlehem are kept silent about how they are suffering under Israel’s inhumane occupation.

*Dietmar Stoller, Lindau*

I would also like to express my special thanks for the articles in Schneller Magazine, which has become a first-class source of information on the situation in the Middle East. I read it all with the greatest of interest.

*Dr Martin Schneller, ambassador ret.,  
Austria*

**Response to Schneller Magazine 3/2021**

I must confess that I don’t always read the Schneller magazine. But this time I couldn’t help but read it all the way through. And to great benefit, not only for my work at The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, but also for my personal spiritual life, especially the intercession for our brothers and sisters who are so quickly forgotten and who really have to fight for survival.



I don’t know where else you can get such a concise overview of the situation in many countries in the Middle East, including Israel, and not just from a purely cultural or political perspective, but from a very personal and spiritual perspective. It really gets deep under your skin. Thank you for this issue and thank you to all who have written these contributions. May Our Lord bless them all.

*Armin Bachor, Ostfildern*

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*For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.*

1 Cor 3:11



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