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# SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



THE TREASURES OF THE EAST  
UNIQUE HERITAGE, ENORMOUS CHALLENGES



EVS Evangelical Association  
for the Schneller Schools

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Dear Reader,

In the past few months, many people have spoken to me about an article which appeared in our last issue. The Palestinian Ambassador in Berlin, Dr Khouloud Daibes, reported on the successful completion of restoration work in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Many said to me that this article was a wonderful sign that there was at last good news from the Middle East.

Now, for the Christmas season, we are going one better: the main feature of this issue is “The treasures of the East”. The articles we received on this topic should admonish all the lies that automatically call the word “crisis” to mind when you hear the word “Middle East”. Reverend Dr Rima Nasrallah from Beirut reports on the liturgical diversity in the Middle East; the Palestinian Dr Viola Raheb from Vienna writes about the literature that influenced her; and her husband Marwan Abado takes a look at the Palestinian-Lebanese music scene. For me, the very personal biographical approach renders these comments even more poignant. On the other hand, would these treasures not remain a mystery to us if they were not “translated” time and again? We finally succeeded in winning over Hartmut Fähndrich, who is one of the most renowned Arab translators, to write an article. Dr Vladimir Latinovic writes about a project by the Catholic Academy to make the Eastern churches in Germany more visible. And my colleague Katja Dorothea Buck ponders on the question that diversity is an opportunity and a risk.



The Schneller schools are also an established part of “The treasures of the East” – once again this became clear in the speech made by Director George Haddad at the Schneller Festival at the beginning of November. Yes, the Middle East is much more than “just crisis”. Although the “Arab Spring” of 2011 met with a brutal end in several countries, people in many places are again taking to the streets to demonstrate for more justice and a better future. We hope and pray that we can pass on the treasures of the East to future generations – and not just in the form of the wonderfully restored Church of the Nativity.

With this in mind the editorial team wishes you a merry and blessed Christmas festival.

Yours

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Uwe Gräbe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Uwe Gräbe

## SEEKING PEACE IN GREAT AND SMALL

I was fortunate to be part of a delegation to visit the Schneller School in Lebanon. A lifelong dream that came to realization during June this year. Reading the bible since my early childhood, wondering where could these places be, that are referred to in the bible, and heard, especially during the times of apartheid in South Africa, when people were experiencing hardships, refer to God as an overseas God. That of course triggers the desire to one day discover the treasures of the east.

The history and everyday living in the Middle East taught us something else as what we portrait of the holy land. At this moment our world must deal with peacekeeping matters at various points on our own continent (Africa), but also at various places around the globe. Can you imagine that there are children born into this world who do not know what peace is?

We hear of peacekeeping forces that have been deployed all over the world. What is unfortunate is that if there is no peace around you, you will have no peace in your own life, in the lives of your family and friends. But the bigger question, and the easier to deal with, is: What am I doing to seek and pursue peace?

**„Seek peace and pursue it.“**

*Psalm 34:14 (NIV)*

All of us are looking for it in some way or other, but what would be the ideal way to do it? Even though there is no ideal answer to it, there are some principles to remember that will help us achieve it because so often war and conflict start



Entrance door to St Michael's Church on the grounds of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School

very small in the hearts and minds of people.

We are called upon by the psalmist to follow a few principles that will lead us on the path to a good life, to enjoy life in 2020:

- Watch your words and do not speak what is evil and untrue;
- Forsake all that you know is evil in your life;
- Give yourself to doing good;
- Actively seek and pursue peace in your relationships with others, even when it is difficult to do so.

So, we may agree that, to enjoy life, to have a good life, there needs to be peace. There needs to be inner peace that which Jesus offered – but also peace in our environment.

The good life that I wish for in 2020 is one in which we are surrounded by family and friends who actively watch their words and avoid speaking evil and untrue things about others. To surround me with family and friends who actively do everything possible to avoid what is evil in life. To surround me with family and friends who go out of their way to do good to others. To surround me with family and friends who love peace and will do everything possible to live it.

Now, if I have such wonderful people around me, what am I doing? Let us commit ourselves to be people actively seeking peace and pursuing it. Let's make it a bit more personal: I will be a person who actively seeks and pursues peace. The wish is to seek AND pursue it.

Let us not just love peace but also seek it. Let us not just seek peace but also pursue it. Pursue holds elements of keeping peace, securing peace, advancing peace, standing for it, being prepared to die for it! Remember with what Jesus challenged us:

**„Peace I leave with you;  
my peace I give you.“**

*Jn. 14:27 (NIV)*

I wish you a Peaceful, Merry Christmas and a more peaceful New Year. Make 2020 a good year as you actively strive towards making it a peaceful year there where you live, but also encourage others to strive for it.

*Reverend Godfrey Cunningham is  
President of the Moravian Church in  
South Africa, a member of the Evangelical  
Mission in Solidarity (EMS).*

## AGAINST THE CULTURAL EXTINCTION OF SPECIES

### Starting small to preserve the treasures of the East

**The treasures of the East are legendary. But they are under a greater threat than ever before as a result of war and extremism. Who would be able to stop the extinction of the cultural heritage in the Middle East?**

There is hardly any other region in the world where so many different cultures, religions and ethnic groups have left their mark: Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans etc. Accordingly, the cultural heritage that all these peoples and cultures have left behind them between the Nile and the Euphrates is infinitely colourful and rich. But it is not only stones that bear witness to the fame and treasures of the past. Even today, there are still many influences to be discovered – in literature, poetry, even when it comes to faith and – a little more mundane – culinary delicacies. Anyone who starts to delve into this unrivalled diversity becomes inevitably enraptured.

However, this heritage is more under threat in the 21st century than ever before. On the one hand, globalisation encourages world-wide homogenisation. The West is dominant, not only economically and politically but also culturally. On the other hand, wars and crises hardly provide any room for culture. Finally, ideologies are gaining ground in the Middle East – and not only there. Their aim is to render heterogeneous societies homogeneous. Sooner or later, this will lead to what can only be termed as the “cultural extinction of species”. In the same way as the air to breathe and the basis of life is taken away

from insects and animals by environmental pollution and climate change, the cultures in the Middle East are threatened with extinction – and not only there.

A sad example of this is the Assyrians in the Middle East. This small Christian minority was almost exterminated in the genocide of 1915. The survivors found refuge in Iraq, among other places, where they suffered another massacre in 1933. Those that survived this renewed attack fled to the Khabour Valley in Syria. Finally, in 2015, the Islamic State overran the Christian villages in this region. The majority of Assyrians has left the Middle East and lives today in Australia, Europe or America. The question is whether they will be able to maintain their culture there.

What could stop this homogenisation mania in the Middle East – and not only there? The task appears to be enormous and it truly is. Nevertheless, a start can and must be made in small ways. If a child learns that it is normal for others to be different, as an adult he or she will also be able to accept differences of opinion, origin, faith etc. What is important here is a strong identity, one that does not draw its strength from marginalisation but which forms a solid foundation to arouse curiosity for the world in all its diversity. Whoever understands that they are part of this diversified whole will be willing to stand up for the whole so that the other can also exist in this world.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

# MORE THAN SIX WAYS TO SING THE SANCTUS

## Liturgical diversity in the Middle East

From its very beginning, Christianity spread in the Middle East interacting with local cultures, languages and world views. From Alexandria to Constantinople passing by Mesopotamian towns and the Armenian Kingdom, it found ways to express itself in imageries, tunes and rituals that were Pharaonic, Persian, Syriac or Greek. This diversity is still present in the Middle East today.

Despite the many attempts in the Byzantine Empire to harmonize and homogenize these colourful expressions of Christianity, the various traditions continued sometimes borrowing from each other and at other points developing their specificity. Today, the descendants of these cultures – though mostly Arab speakers – still practice their ancient rites using a combination of

ancient and modern styles and languages. In a typical city such as Beirut or Aleppo, one can find up to 12 different Christian traditions that can be clustered in a variety of ways and along many different lines such as doctrine, language, geography, or ecclesiology.

Church traditions can meet with some over doctrine such as is the case with the Oriental family which groups all non-chalcedonian Churches or over geography as in the example of the Churches of Iraq that are experiencing today similar circumstances.

However, language remains a clear demarcation when it comes to ritual diversity. The five groups of language that mark the ritual diversity are first the Syriac-Aramaic family which uses in various degrees one form of Syriac. We find here the Assyrian, Chaldean, Syriac



Katja Buck

A woman singing an Aramaic hymn in the choir at an Assyrian church in Beirut.

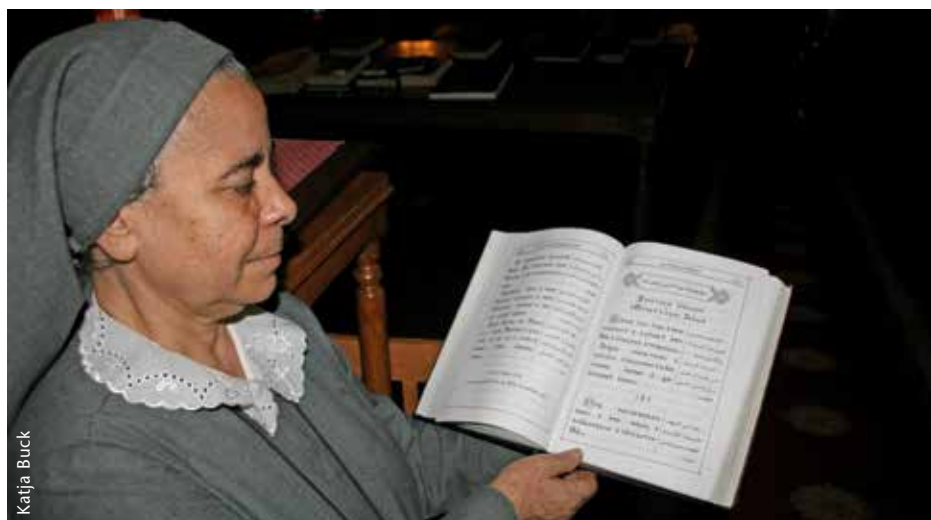
Orthodox, Syriac Catholic and Maronite Churches, each impacted by the metaphorical and symbolic style of worship and borrowing from a rich collection of ancient texts and poetry. Second, we have the Coptic family with its roots mainly in Egypt, incorporating Pharaonic bells and monastic tunes both in its Orthodox and Catholic forms.

Thirdly, we find the Armenian family where the liturgy parallels the long history of the Armenian people from their developments among Persians and Cappadocians, to the invention of their alphabet, their intimate alliance with the crusaders, and their experience of Genocide. The different liturgical objects, intricate movements and ancient Krapar language all testify to this history experienced by its Apostolic, Catholic and Evangelical strands.

Fourthly, we mention the glorious Byzantine-Greek family in both Orthodox

and Catholic forms, occupying colourful and richly decorated churches echoing the pomp of the ancient Empire in its chants and its processions. Finally, we find a variety of communities both Catholic and Protestant with their roots in Western countries. For the latter group language has been a more functional matter and therefore their appropriation of the Arabic language in the liturgical context has been easier.

Nevertheless, from the sumptuous and majestic Byzantine tradition to the rather bare Assyrian liturgy we find some common themes among these traditions such as a certain understanding of time, space and the material world. All these, at the exception of the more recent family of Protestant and Evangelical Churches, reflect in their liturgies a certain understanding of time that stretches from creation till the end times.



Katja Buck

A nun in Upper Egypt shows her Coptic prayer book.





Katja Buck

**Magnificent and colourful: the new Greek Orthodox Church in Broumana (Lebanon).**

Church structure as well as the annual liturgical rhythm present the faithful with 'all' of history. Churches that are particularly marked by a Byzantine tradition surround the worshippers via their iconography and frescos with a time that precedes our present and continues beyond it through the portrayal of Biblical events, images of prophets, Saints, bishops and future hopes. Time in general is sanctified and the liturgical year offers a continuous succession of seasons centred around Easter and punctuated by particular fasts and feasts that remind each tradition with its own reading and its own place in salvation history. These liturgies are not isolated events that take place during an hour on a Sunday morning but are a continuation of an action that started as early as creation itself.

They are hosted in physical sanctuaries that parallel the universe in their architecture giving the entire created world a sacramental dimension. Every Sunday, each of these traditions raises its voice in praise, yet each uses a different language, tune and instruments reminding us that there are many ways to worship the same Lord.

*Rima Nasrallah van Saane is Pastor of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut and lectures at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut.*

## GETTING TO KNOW INVISIBLE BROTHERS AND SISTERS

### A project focuses on the Eastern churches in Germany

**With the “Treasures of the East” project which will last several years, the Academy of the Rottenburg-Stuttgart Diocese intends to make Orthodox and Oriental churches visible in our country and establish sustainable contacts with them. This has become more important than ever with the arrival of many Christian refugees from the Middle East.**

The Middle East is the cradle of Christianity. But the Christians living there have hardly any chance of survival. Many have had to either flee or they are doing so now. Today, they find their spiritual home in the Orthodox and Oriental churches in Germany. This represents new ecumenical challenges for the Catholic and Evangelical churches in Germany. One problem is the relative invisibility of Oriental and Orthodox churches in Germany resulting in unawareness, sometimes almost ignorance on the part of the established churches and the general public about these churches.

In the state of Wuerttemberg the Evangelical church has been working for many years on a number of projects together with Oriental and Orthodox churches, dioceses and congregations. In the past, the Catholic diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart had undertaken no similar projects. This is why the Academy of the Rottenburg-Stuttgart diocese started the “Treasures of the East” project in 2016. The aim is to establish relationships with representatives of the established Oriental and Orthodox churches in Baden-

Wuerttemberg and Germany based on trust and through sustainable contacts. The other goal is to organise a variety of events which will promote familiarisation and presentation of Oriental churches and their structures to the general public.

Contacts were made with a number of representatives of Oriental and Orthodox churches during the first phase of the project (June 2016 to December 2016). The executive echelons of the Orthodox Bishops’ Conference in Germany (OBKD) and the Central Council of Oriental Christians (ZOCD) were also included. The first basic information items of the most important issues were discussed as well as the first items of agreement and disagreement that would be addressed during the project.

The aim of the second phase (January 2017 to June 2017) was to raise the visibility of Oriental churches in Baden-Wuerttemberg. The key part of this phase was to prepare and implement a large series of events entitled “Oriental Church Week” which took place in the summer of 2019. At these events Christians from the Oriental churches presented information about their faith, traditions and culture to an interested public and explained the current situation in their countries of origin. The conference at the end of that week focused strongly on the personal and biographical experiences and stories of Orthodox and ancient Oriental Christians.

A unique information portal was developed for the Oriental Churches in the third project phase (August 2017 to January 2018): [www.ostkirchen.info](http://www.ostkirchen.info). The

aim was to strengthen the joint presence of Oriental Churches on the web and to sustainably improve public communication and the visibility of Oriental Churches. During its first year on the net, the website reached over 35,000 visitors world-wide and reported almost two million clicks to various posts.

In the final project phase that has been running since January 2018, steps were taken to improve relationships between the Catholic and Orthodox Oriental Churches. For example, during a conference in the summer of 2019, the Academy of the Rottenburg-Stuttgart Diocese started a thread entitled “Stolen churches or bridges to Orthodoxy” between United and Orthodox Churches. For the first time, representatives of the United and Orthodox Churches met theologians at an international conference and searched for ways to promote dialogue

and relationships. The next conference is planned for 2021 in the Ukraine. And finally, further topics such as religious freedom in the Middle East and the preservation of ancient Middle East cultures will be discussed at various conferences taking place though to the end of 2021.

*Vladimir Latinovic is head of the “Treasures of the East” project organised by the Academy of the Rottenburg-Stuttgart Diocese. For more information, visit [www.akademie-rs.de/projekte/schatz-des-oriens/](http://www.akademie-rs.de/projekte/schatz-des-oriens/)*



Kai Loges/Akademie DRS

**If you want to learn about the treasures of the East, you must first make contact.**

## A WORTHWHILE VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

### The rich literary and poetic treasures of the East

Countless poems, tales and novels are witness to a literary richness that has influenced generations of people in the Middle East. It is well worthwhile to discover this treasure. Translations also make them accessible to those who do not know Arabic.

We were schoolchildren... pubescent...cheeky...curious... witty and much more! One of our favourite pastimes was to pit ourselves against each other in poetry slams – between classes, during breaks, in the school yard or simply on the way to school! One of us would start with a verse taken at random from any poem and before it was clear how the verse would end, someone else in the group would shoot a new verse into the round, starting with the letter at the end of the last verse. We would compete against each other for hours on end as proof of the rich treasure of our Arabic poetry. It didn't matter whether it was a verse from al-Muallaqat, the famous pre-Islamic poems by the poet Imru Al Qais (501–565) or a poem by the female poet al-Khansa (575–646)<sup>1</sup> or by al-Mutanabbi (915/917–965).

We often recited modern poems, for example by the female Iraqi poet Nazik al-Malaika (1923–2007), the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008), the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani (1923–1998), the female Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan (1917 – 2003) or the Egyptian poet Ahmad Shawqi (1868–1932). This list can go on for ever.

It was also at school where we learnt about the works of the best known authors of the Orient, among them books such as “Al-Bukhala” (English: “The Misers”) by Al-Jahiz (776–869), “The Prophet” by Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883–1931), “The First Well; a Bethlehem Boyhood” by Jabra Ibrahim Jabra (1919–1994) or “Al-Ayyam”, the autobiography by the Egyptian author Taha Hussein (1889–1973). The picture of a blind professor who brought light into many people's lives by his wake-up call and commitment to education touched me deeply in my youth. Nagib Mahfuz (1911–2006), the Egyptian writer who was the first Arabic-speaking author to receive the Nobel Prize for literature, said that Taha Hussein deserved to receive the prize in his stead. Yes, I am eternally grateful to have grown up at a time when we were able to gain insights into the treasure chest of centuries-old literary poetry.

This rich heritage has also inspired Western thinkers, authors and translators over the centuries. For example, the Austrian diplomat and Orientalist Joseph Hammer-Purgstall who translated several Oriental works into German, among them the poems of al-Mutanabbi<sup>2</sup> or “The Divan” by the Persian poet and mystic Hafiz (1325–1390). “The Divan” by Hafiz inspired Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to write his “West-Eastern Divan”. In 1829, Philipp Wolff translated the “Oriental Fables. Calila and Dimna or the Fables of Bidpai” into German. In 1846, Friedrich Rückert translated “Hamāsa or the Oldest Arabic Folk Songs compiled by Abu Temmām”. Recently, a German translation was published of the poems by the



It's never too soon to practise if you want to become an avid reader – preschool class in Syria

Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabis (1165–1240).<sup>3</sup>

Today, a centuries-old legacy of this kind no longer fits into the concepts of the monolithic religious movements that exist in many areas of the East. In fact, they pose more of a danger. In the West, the East is dismissed as a region that has no interest in culture. This makes it all the more important to make these treasures available to a much wider public instead of just a limited educated elite. Since the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the publishing house of Unionsverlag, the Lenos-Verlag or C.H. Beck have been offering Arabic literature translated into German, so performing a valuable service to society. Not forgetting the “exile” or “diaspora” literature from Oriental authors living abroad. It's well worthwhile browsing in search of one of the other voices. It would be desirable if as many readers as possible discovered this literature!

*Viola Raheb is a religious scholar and scientific assistant at the Faculty of Protestant Theology at the University of University of Vienna.*

<sup>1</sup> Poems especially by female Arab poets are not very common. For more information see Khalid Al-Maaly (Ed.), *Die Flügel meines schweren Herzens* (The wings of my heavy heart) / Poetry by female Arab poets from the 5th century to the present day. Translated from Arabic into German by Khalid Al-Maaly and Heribert Becker, Manesse Verlag 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Hammer-Purgstall, *Motenebbi, der größte arabische Dichter. Al Mutanabbi Abu t-Tayeb* (Motenebbi, the great Arab poet. Al-Mutanabbi Abu t-Tayeb) , Heubner Verlag, Vienna, 1824.

<sup>3</sup> Stefan Weidner, *Ibn Arabi: „Der Übersetzer der Sehnsüchte - Liebesgedichte aus dem arabischen Mittelalter“* (The Translator of Desires – Love poems from the Arabic Middle Ages)

# THE FAMILIAR AND THE UNKNOWN IN DIFFERENT GARB

## Challenges when translating from Arabic

**There are two reactions that still occur frequently when handling Arabic literature: indulgence or deletion. Fortunately, the variations between these two extremes are gradually becoming more numerous and diverse.**

**I**ndulgence is the usual time-honoured reaction since the European readership was flooded with translations of “One Thousand and One Nights” (also known as “Arabian Nights”). That was in the late 18th century and people indulged in the works of Arabic literature, poetry and prose from long-gone centuries. That era has left a long-term impression on our image of the Arabic world and its literature. J.W. Goethe also played a part in this here in Germany along with Wilhelm Hauff and Friedrich Rückert.

Arabic contemporary literature only really started to gain attention a few decades ago, both in the German-speaking region and elsewhere. And this is where it starts to become serious: how does one handle the unknown or the familiar in a different linguistic garb? These two – the unknown and the other linguistic garb – tempt the translator to simplify, paraphrase or delete. Frequent changes in images, metaphors, idioms and expressions show where the problem actually lies: in the capability and the will to accept images, idioms, sayings and styles of writing that are not usual in our language.

The contradiction between pragmatic equivalence and semantic equivalence usually means that what is really different

is removed from a text. This means it is argued whether expression X has the same impact in the source language as expression Y in the target language. For example, “snow-white” is the equivalent of “milk-white” in Arabic and is therefore “European” and it should be translated as “snow-white” (German “schneeweiss”, French “blanc comme la neige”). But how fitting is the image when the word is used in the context of a desert? And should readers of Arabic literature not be expected to take the mental step from snow-white to milk-white, even if the latter sounds more unfamiliar than the first?

### Enduring the unknown

This can also be regarded from the other viewpoint. What images and expressions “should” remain since they are unfitting for many reasons and fall victim to the editor’s deletion mark? Here are some scurrilities that belong to the archives of German literature: “Fröhlich machet das Haus den Esser Er leert es” (English: The house maketh the feaster merry: it is emptied out.) or: “die ausgerottete Pest. Der Postbote wirft sie als Brief in den rassenden Kasten” (English: “...the extinct pest. The postman drops it as a letter in the rattling box” or older: “Der Sommer war sehr groß” (The summer was very great”) or even older: “Da werden Weiber zu Hyänen ...” (English: Women turn into hyenas) or „Die Sonne tönt nach alter Weise“ (The Sun, in ancient guise, competing/With brother sphere in rival song). It would not be difficult to continue this pot-pourri – all this is merely a matter of the author’s style and mode of expression!

## Language structure

But besides the images and thought forms that language expresses, there are also the actual structural characteristics which repeatedly cause “annoyance and fascination”. This refers to the peculiarities which distinguish one language (family) from another. Things that offer specific possibilities of expression which must be rendered differently in the target language. The most striking feature which Arabic shares with other Semitic languages is certainly its morphology. For example, the



EMS/Gräbe

A bookshop in Beirut – What treasures may be lying in wait there?

three consonants ktb, which is actually the root form, engenders the idea of “to write”. This root can be varied but then it means many different things which are all to do with writing: *kataba* means “he wrote”, *kattaba* means “he made (someone) write”, i.e. “he dictated”, *kâtaba* “he wrote to someone”, i.e. “he corresponded or exchanged letters”, *iktataba* “he enrolled” and “he subscribed”. There are also noun derivatives, for example *kitâb* “book”, *maktab* “office”, *maktaba* “library” or “bookshop” and *maktûb*, which in fact means “written”, not only “letter” but also “fate” – because it is written all over one’s face.

## Culture and language

At this point, cultural concepts, traditions and ideas meld with the language. Language tradition or common images then merge with personal expressions which, as in all languages, may sound smooth or clumsy, but which the reader has to endure if there is a real desire to get to know a foreign literature. Most of it is understandable without any problems. But when this is no longer possible, the translator has to intervene. For example, an owl in Arabic is not a bird of wisdom but a bird of ill omen and this must be explained in some way or other. This kind of problem is a translator’s daily bread. But it is also allowed to pause once in a while and consider what is really left over after translation work is finished.

*Hartmut Fähndrich is one of the most well-known Arabic to German translators. Between 1984 and 2010, he edited the series “Arabische Literatur” (Arabic Literature) at the Lenos publishing house in Basel.*

## DISCOVERING HOMETOWN MUSIC FROM AFAR

### Musical gems in the Arab world

**I left my native city of Beirut a long time ago. From our patio I had a wide view over the Mediterranean. My childhood and youth in the 1970s and 1980s were marked by the violent conflicts between many quarrelling parties. This was the context in which music and the Mediterranean became my trusted haven!**

At that time, Beirut was a cosmopolitan city. Many of the political, cultural and social movements in the large metropolises of the Western world found an echo in the Lebanese capital. At that time, the prevailing general opinion was still that everything that came from the West was the best.

As a result, music in my youth was very influenced by the West. The guitar was present everywhere in those times. The political and social criticism songs of this generation of artists left a deep impression on me. On the other hand, the world of Arab songs almost always spoke and still speaks about love. But the artists of the 1970s enriched the music scene with totally different topics. Many songwriters focused on Palestinian poetry. Poems by Mahmoud Darwish, Samih Alqasim, Tawfiq Ziad and Ezzedine Almunasara were not only to be read in poetry books. The voices of the singers made them audible. They were broadcast by many radio stations which were part of the political landscape. At the same time, and despite the fragmentation of Lebanese society, the voices of Lebanese singer Fairuz and composer and singer Wadiah Alsafi always created a non-partisan image of a country and

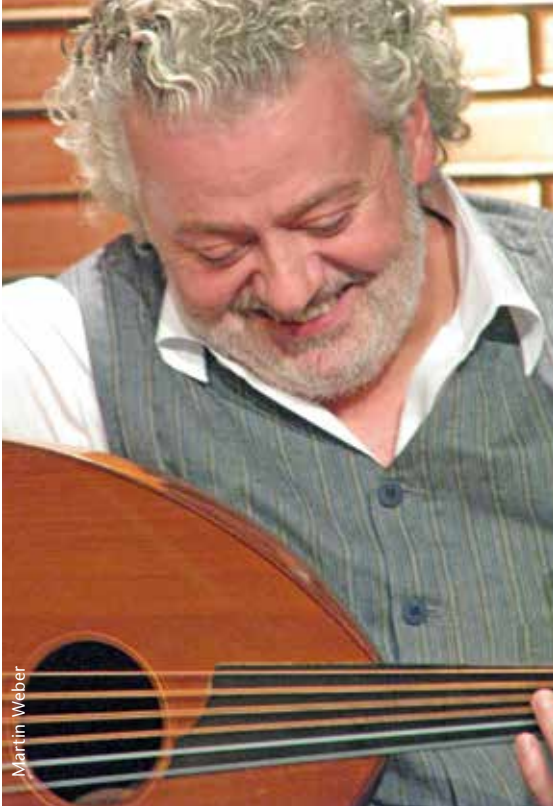
a yearning for “better times”.

As a young person, I gradually felt my way into the music of this diversified scene. My parents tried to enrol me at the music conservatory. But because of my status as a Palestinian refugee, it was not easy to enrol at public institutions in the country. So, the gates to musical education were closed to me. On the other hand, I was free to teach myself an instrument. With this in mind, I bought many cassettes and tried to reproduce what I heard on my first oud.

Later, my passion for music led me to a group which put on concerts of political songs – in the middle of a raging civil war! My parents were worried about me. After I graduated from high school, they sent me to my elder brother who was living in Vienna in the hope that I would fare better there and that I would start my medical studies. As the youngest of seven children, they longed for me to become a doctor.

Once I was in Vienna, I started regular oud lessons with an Iraqi oud master from the Baghdad Institute of Fine Arts which was started in the 1930s by Sherif Muhiddin Targan who was born in Istanbul at the time of the Ottoman Empire. As oud master, he taught in Iraq which was then still a monarchy. He died in 1967 in the Republic of Turkey. Among his pupils were soloists such as Jamil Bachir and Munir Bachir. Jamil Bachir developed a totally modern oud style for upcoming generations of oud soloists. And Munir Bachir enraptured his audiences in many parts of the world, gaining a considerable interna-





Martin Weber

**His aim is to make people experience the rich world of Arab music: the oud player Marwan Abado**

know what it is called. Many called my instrument a “guitar” and some children even used the Arab verb “yetantan” (transl. to make sounds) to describe the instrument.

In the meantime, I have started the first oud class in Austria at the POPAkademie in Vienna. This is where people are free to enjoy the rich world of Arab music and its diversity.

*Marwan Abado is a Palestinian singer composer and oud player. He has lived in Vienna since 1985.*

tional reputation with his music style. It was only when I was far from my homeland that I discovered the gems of Arab music, whether it was in Arab countries or in exile or even further away.

Three years ago, I had the opportunity to conduct music workshops in several Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The children, educators and I had so much fun playing music together. However, I was sad to realise that none of the roughly 270 children knew anything about my instrument, the Al Oud, and didn’t even

## TOLERANCE, INFLUENCE AND FLEXIBILITY

### Educational principles at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School

**In a lecture entitled “Education in an Increasingly Diverse Context”, Reverend George Haddad, Director of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon, presented the educational concept of the school at the EVS General Meeting at the beginning of November (see page 18 onwards). We quote extracts from his lecture.**

**H**addad compares the educational principles at the school to a stone-arch. The two basic elements of tolerance and influence come from opposite sides to form an arch. In many ways, the arch may be composed of many different stones, as can be seen in many old buildings in the Middle East: stones of different sizes, shapes, hewn or unhewn and sometimes of different colors. The cornerstone is Jesus Christ. JLSS is first and foremost a Protestant Christian school that carries its mission to underprivileged children, to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe those needing clothes, and welcome strangers.

“We do it exactly as Jesus asked: to the least of his brothers and sisters, to the least of society and the most needy. Jesus’ brothers and sisters that we have in JLSS are like the stones of the old Lebanese house. They are different in every way: different religions, different denominations, different nationalities, different backgrounds, different needs, different capabilities, different talents, and the list goes on and on. We provide them with care, education or vocational training, exercising tolerance with them,

yet at the same time influencing them as much as we can.”

The balance between tolerance and influence, is what keeps the JLSS mission going. “I will take this picture from ancient architecture even further. When earthquakes happen, the ability of the stones in the old Lebanese house to wiggle left and right helps it to withstand the magnitude of the earthquake. The same is with us in JLSS. During difficult times we wiggle our policy in one direction or the other. This completes the cycle: tolerance on one side, influence on the other, and flexibility in between.”

In the second part of his lecture, Haddad spoke about the practical side of implementation. It is important to teach the children to make their own decisions on religious practices. For example, it is explained to the students that they may follow religious leaders, as long as they don’t teach them to hurt others. “Hurting others is not, and must not be, the teaching of religion, be it Christianity or Islam.”

Ramadan is also an example of how the policy of tolerance versus influence is implemented. During Ramadan students are allowed to fast, but young children are not allowed to do so. “We know it is very wrong for young children to fast.” Another example is the hijab. Girls are allowed to wear the headscarf (hijab), but they are not allowed to wear the hijab inside the boarding home where they live as in a family.

Besides teaching ethical issues, the behavioral approach of JLSS staff with authenticity and honesty towards children is the most important element. “The wonderful work of the Schneller team for many years, can be completely undone by a single incident, a single remark, or a single mistake committed by one member of staff, unless it is matched with ideal behavioral treatment of students by teachers, trainers, and members of staff.” This challenge is addressed through what we call, the open-door policy of dialogue. If a student has a problem, with the educator, teacher, or trainer and the problem is not solved by dialogue, he/she can bring the problem directly to the director. When the adult is wrong or makes a mistake, he/she must apologize. “This may appear to be a simple approach, but when you take into consideration the diversity of people in JLSS, the challenge becomes clearly apparent.”

As examples, Haddad mentioned the hatred between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, the political schism among the Lebanese, or Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian racism. “Many of the JLSS staff or their relatives were imprisoned, beaten, tortured, or even killed by the Syrian soldiers during the Syrian occupation of Lebanon.” Therefore, it was not easy having 35 Syrian refugee children in JLSS and teaching single refugee mothers to sew. He is frequently criticized that he treats Syrians better than the Lebanese. Taking them in despite all this and treating them as we treat anybody else is the mission of the Schneller schools.

*Reverend George Haddad*

*You will find a longer version of this lecture in English on the EMS website at:  
<https://ems-online.org/aktuelles/22-07-2019-2019/03-11-2019-education-in-an-increasingly-diverse-context/>*



Katja Buck

**Different in color, shape and size – but together the stones for a stable house**

## UNDER THE PROMISE OF THE RAINBOW

### General Meeting of the Schneller Association

Over 80 friends of Schneller work came to the General Meeting of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) at the Gaisburg Church in the east of Stuttgart on 3 November. Also attending were Reverend George Haddad, Director of the Schneller school in Lebanon (see p16 onwards), and Frank Otfried July, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg.

Not only did Frank Otfried July come in his function as a high dignitary but also as a person who is knowledgeable about the Schneller schools. The Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg visited the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon in September 2018. In his sermon on the story of Noah's ark, July repeatedly spoke about the situation in the Middle East. "The rainbow has a special meaning in this region of unrest. I always ask myself where the Schneller schools find the inner strength in view of all the dark clouds over them to continue working despite everything." July remembers the Syrian refugee children at the JLSS who had been traumatised by the war in their home country. "Now the invasion of Turkey into Syria in contravention of international law has brought new suffering to the region. There is no way to

whitewash or hush up what has happened," said July. It's like Noah on the dark sea. Hardly had he found an island to rest that new violence broke out and new floods washed them away. Christians must learn to deal with powerlessness and bear them spiritually. "At the end of the Great Flood, Noah was faced with hard work. But hard work also held great promise." The Schneller schools must also perform hard work to continue. "But their work stands under the promise of the rainbow," said July.



The Syrian-Armenian student Christine Maamarbashi and Katja Dorothea Buck playing a waltz by Aram Khachaturian. Anselm Kreh helped turn the pages.



EMS/Conzelmann

**Schneller friends in a variety of functions. From left to right: Silvan Eppinger, Susanne Gözl, Musa al-Munaizel (all three from the EVS), Dagmar Bujack (SVS), Martina Waiblinger, Uwe Gräbe, Christian Kissling (all three from the EVS), Frank Otfried July, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg, Reinhold Schaal, Kerstin Sommer, Anselm Kreh (all three from the EVS), Ursus Waldmeier (SVS) and Christoph Hildebrandt-Ayasse, who reports to congregations in Wuerttemberg on the Schneller schools.**

Uwe Gräbe reported about the two schools at the General Meeting that ensued in the parish hall where the EVS attendees enjoyed excellent catering provided by members of the Gaisburg parish. He said that since the middle of October, life in Lebanon was an unending series of demonstrations and roadblocks. "Many things had come to a head," said Gräbe and quoted some examples, such as the waste problem that had persisted for years, constant power cuts, poor drinking water quality and the severe forest fires last September that could not be extinguished at the beginning since spare parts had been purchased for the fire-fighting helicopters on the black market. The straw that broke the camel's back was an internet tax which would mainly hit people who could not afford an expensive mobile phone contract. "Even if the tax had been revoked immediately, people had simply become fed up with a corrupt political caste that was bleeding the country dry. Nobody knows how things will turn out," said Gräbe, describing the

situation.

Gräbe went on to say that a major problem for the JLSS was the condition of the carpentry workshop building. "The floor is moving and in the meantime the structural condition is so poor that carpentry training had to be moved to the Hermann Schneller Hall." Fortunately, an appeal for donations had resulted in 150,000 euros. This meant that work could now start on plans for a new carpentry building.

Gräbe reported that a philanthropic foundation from the USA had entered into partnership with the Theodor Schneller School. They had already invested 100,000 dollars in a strategic overall plan. "If this actually ends in a cooperation, the foundation promised even higher amounts," said Gräbe.

Meanwhile, the first year of students in the hotel and gastronomy training course at the TSS had graduated. All the graduates had found jobs immediately on the labour market. The hairdresser training course

had also made a promising start. “Although they are not prestigious training courses in themselves, for those who come from the fringes of society and have learning difficulties, the course are often just the right thing for them,” said Gräbe.

After the Executive Secretary’s report, EVS Treasurer Christian Kissling presented the financial statement for 2018. The Association had earned a total income of 1,034,354 euros. The fact that in 2017 income was almost 200,000 euros higher than in 2018 is the result of a large bequest. “All in all, income more or less remained the same,” said Kissling. The General Meeting discharged the Executive Board and the Treasurer unanimously. The seven members of the Board abstained.

The Chair of the Executive Board, Kerstin Sommer, and her Deputy, Reinhold Schaal, presented their reports. One theme for the coming years will be how to maintain contact with former volunteers. It was gratifying to learn that in the meantime the EVS has an entry in Wikipedia so that everyone can learn about the Association on the internet.

“There is at last movement in the Association,” said Kerstin Sommer and pointed out that the Association was growing by seven to eight members every year. “This is quite remarkable for such an old association,” she said. The EVS currently has 296 members.

The two Chairs of the Swiss Association for the Schneller Schools (SVS), Ursus Waldmeier and Dagmar Bujack, also came to Stuttgart to attend the General Meeting. “We are delighted and grateful for the excellent cooperation and we are looking forward to a lively exchange,” said Reinhold Schaal. He reported that this summer, the SVS had assumed the maintenance costs for the heating system at the JLSS. Next January, the Executive Boards of the two associations would meet in Switzerland for a joint meeting.

In the coming year, the EVS will convene its General Meeting which will probably take place on 8 November 2020. The venue has not yet been announced.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

## FACTS & FIGURES

In the current academic year, it has been a long time since there were so many children and young adults living at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. “Every bed is taken,” writes Director George Haddad. And the school is constantly receiving more requests. It is pleasing to see that the school is also receiving a sufficient number of applications from young women and men to fill all the vacancies at the school and the boarding home.

In hard figures, a total of 268 children and young adults are attending the JLSS. Of these, 142 girls and boys are living at the boarding home. 109 young adults are receiving vocational training.

# WHEN THE EAST DOES NOT LET YOU GO

## Former Middle East volunteers meet in Stuttgart

**What do a pilot, a construction machine technician, a teacher, a physicist and an anthropologist have in common? They all once completed a period of voluntary service in the Middle East. At the beginning of November, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) invited former volunteers from the past 20 years to a meeting in Stuttgart.**

At the start of the 1990s, the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) started to send volunteers to the Middle East, in particular to Lebanon and Jordan. But it was only in 2001 when the Ecumenical Youth Volunteers Programme (EYVP) was founded that the EMS had an official state subsidised programme. Since then, the EYVP has acted as the umbrella to send young people to the Middle East as well as other parts of the world. The institutions where they

fulfil their service include the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon and the Theodor Schneller School (TSS), the integrated school for the blind in Irbid and the "Holy Land Institute for the Deaf" in Salt, all three in Jordan.

Every volunteer who has spent a period of service in the Middle East knows that the region does not let them go so easily. It is the people, the culture, the landscape and the food that remain in their memories for ever. This also became evident at the first meeting of former volunteers which the EVS hosted at the beginning of November. It gave the 25 former Middle East volunteers an opportunity to revive their memories of the Middle East for a short while and see familiar faces again. Some members of the EVS Executive Board were also at the meeting. Musa Al Munaizel, former Head of the Educational Centre of the TSS in Amman, EVS Executive Secretary Uwe Gräbe and the Director of the JLSS in Lebanon, George Haddad, also came to the meeting.

From what the former volunteers related, it was clear that the Middle East had changed quite a lot in the past 20 years. For example, the volunteers who were in Lebanon and Jordan before 2011, were free to travel in Syria without any misgivings. One volunteer reported that she had to leave Lebanon together with other volunteers because of the



EMS/Weiße

Many former volunteers brought photos from the time of their service abroad.

political uprising by the Hezbollah. At that time, the Schneller school was unable to guarantee their safety any longer.

In his report, journalist Bodo Weissenborn described how much the situation had changed in the two countries. Weissenborn works as journalist for the Hessischer Rundfunk. He is author and member of the Executive Board of the Middle East magazine “dis:orient” (formerly Alsharq) and tour guide for Alsharq-Reisen (tour operators). He provided the former volunteers with a deep look at the current situation in the Middle East in his (German) presentation entitled “The civil societies in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon – under pressure or on the trigger?” The interviews that Weissenborn had conducted with committed local residents shortly before the meeting met with a great deal of interest. They clearly showed the efforts of the civil societies in each of the countries.

However, the focus was clearly on Lebanon due to the current unrest and the precarious economic situation in the country. Nevertheless, Weissenborn also reported about teacher protests in Jordan which have resulted in a drastic rise in teacher salaries. What was also remarkable were the views of Syrian interviewees who were full of optimism and commitment for the civil society in their country, despite bleak future prospects.

Many of the former volunteers have long been pursuing successful careers. Everything was represented, from Lufthansa pilots and theologians, social scientists and lawyers through to construction machine technicians. Whatever the differences between the experiences and career paths of the former volunteers, they all agree on one thing: their time in the Middle East was one of the best and most impressive experiences in their lives.

*Felix Weiß*



EMS/Weiß

Two former volunteers exchange memories of their time in the Middle East.



# CAFFEE ARABICUM

## A special kind of intercultural festival

**In October, the Freundeskreis Flüchtlinge Feuerbach (Refugee Support Group) invited new citizens and long-established residents to the “Caffee arabicum”. The auctions included artefacts made by Arab artisans from the Schneller schools in Lebanon and Jordan.**

Coffee began its triumphal march throughout the world in the Arab port of Mokka. The Turks brought it to Europe. In Germany at that time, people were warned against drinking the “dangerous Turkish beverage”. The Freundeskreis Flüchtlinge Feuerbach had the idea of bringing cultures together under the slogan of “Caffee arabicum”. The intention was for people to get to know each other while they enjoyed coffee and music.

The event started with the “Coffee Cantata”, a miniature comic opera by Johann Sebastian Bach. It was performed at the Protestant church in Stuttgart Feuerbach under the direction of Cantor Christine Marx with soloists Magdalena Niewiadomska (soprano), Felix Haberland (tenor), Ulrich Kadelbach (bass) and a musical ensemble. At the end, the international audience applauded enthusiastically.

“Caffee arabicum” was also a small token of gratitude to the citizens of Feuerbach by new citizens who stem mainly from Arab counties. Arabic coffee was served in the community hall together with delicious home-made Oriental sweetmeats. The well-known musician Mazen Mohsen played

Syrian folk songs accompanied on his oud and told anecdotes about the history of coffee in German and Arabic. Special thanks go to Rauaa Albakhit and Nabil Najjar who translated the texts into Arabic.

At the end, a special kind of auction sold artefacts made by Arab artisans from glass, ceramics, metal and wood. Some of them came from the workshops of the two Schneller schools in Lebanon and Jordan and belonged to the estate of Rose Lohrmann who had taught for many years in Amman. Her niece had donated the artefacts for the auction. The proceeds and monies from the collection during the concert totalled 1,007 euros which will be donated to the Schneller schools. The Feuerbach Refugee Support Group wanted to set a sign that there was not only work to be done here in Germany but that aid was also needed in the countries where the refugees had come from.

*Michael Zeiß*



Michael Zeiß

**The “Coffee Cantata” by Bach delighted the international audience.**

## ALL OF A SUDDEN, WAR BREAKS OUT AGAIN

A young pastor reports from northern Syria and Lebanon

**Unexpectedly and almost at the same time, the situation in Lebanon and northern Syria deteriorated dramatically in the middle of October. Adon Nabih Naaman experienced both at first hand. The young Syrian pastor had just passed his examinations at the Near East School of Theology in Beirut and was responsible for the Protestant parish in Malkieh in the north east of Syria. In a Facebook post, he writes how quickly life can be deluged with conflict.**

**M**alkieh is a small town of just under 40,000 inhabitants directly on the border to Turkey and Iraq. When Turkish troops marched into North Syria in contravention of international law on 9 October and triggered another spiral of violence, Reverend Adon Naaman was attending a church conference in Iraq. All of a sudden, all the roads were blocked and he was unable to return to his parish. As a result, he fled to Beirut, the city where he had studied until recently. There he experienced the moments when people suddenly started to demonstrate against the corrupt political caste on 17 October. A few days later, he wrote from Beirut on Facebook:

“Today, I am displaced from where I should be, far from the church I have been serving for a month and a half. Turkey’s invasion prevents me from going back to the church of Malkieh where I am serving. Roads are blocked and I have no way

to go back just now. I also have nothing to offer but prayer, hope and writing these words. I am very sad because I am unable to pray with my parishioners in these hard days where their houses are being shelled out and there is a shortage of supply of basic food.

I traveled to Iraq to participate in a conference where we met with many other representatives of regional churches. When I left the city ten days ago, the city was teeming with demonstrations for political and economic reforms. People of Malkieh did not know that the fragile peace they were living in was about to be broken! This is the situation with Christians in the east today, a fragile and paradoxical state between peace and war that knows no end nor beginning.

In Iraq I had visited the city of Mosul which was invaded in 2014 by ISIS. No words can describe what happened to this city, survivors tell you unbelievable stories. I felt very sad when I saw the ruins of the war-torn city as I imagined how people were forced to leave their homes with nothing, not even their medicines.

I did not experience the bustle of war during the eight years of the Syrian war as I came from Latakia which was relatively calm with economic difficulty, but nothing is comparable to the ruthless war in other places. Perhaps this is why, today, I am feeling I am imprisoned in Beirut where protests have started two days ago as well! It feels as if it is my destiny to keep moving between spots of tension. It seems as we are at a critical stage in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. The world is changing



Oannes Consulting GmbH

Many people in Syria would like to see what this graffito in Amuda North Syria represents. The original graffito by the artist Banksy is on the wall in Bethlehem.

rapidly and people can no longer remain silent to whomever is stealing, extorting or intimidating them. People are fed up with corruption and weak non-strategic economic solutions.

The haven of believers in God is their prayers, and I hope that today we pray for all people on earth and for every country suffering from war, aggression or economic or political crisis. Our faith is the safe harbour in the midst of the storm, and our prayers bring us together and unite us with Jesus Christ who also suffered from pain but gave us hope through his glorious resurrection."

*Adon Nabih Naaman*

## INFO

Adon Naaman returned to his parish in Malkieh on 4 November. On 11 November there were several devastating bombings killing many people in Qamishly which is 100 kilometres away. One day later, the Armenian Catholic priest Hovsep Petoyan from Qamishly was shot in his car by the Islamic State. His father also died during the attack. Deacon Fati Sano from al-Hasakeh survived with severe injuries.





We bid farewell

### Obituary for Yeghia Yeghiayan

Yeghia Yeghiayan died in October in Dollard-des-Ormeaux (Canada) at the ripe old age of 100. Yeghiayan arrived at the Syrian Orphanage when he was 10 years old and later completed his training as an electrician there. When the British closed down the institution in 1939, Yeghiayan stayed on for a time to maintain the electrical and water supplies. "I was the last one to leave the Orphanage," he wrote in an article in Schneller Magazine 4-2010.

During his whole life, Yeghia Yeghiayan kept contact with his former Syrian Orphanage classmates who had scattered all over the world. He also kept contact with the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) until a few years ago. In razor-sharp written letters and in perfect German he related about his time at the Syrian Orphanage. At the 150th anniversary of Schneller work in 2010, he sent a video in which he told the festival guests about all the twists and turns in his life that had only been possible due to Schneller work.

With the death of Yeghia Yeghiayan the Schneller work has lost a great friend and companion. We will honour his memory with respect.

*Katja Dorothea Buck*

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The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Luke 2:20 (NRSV)



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