

SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



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Jordan

A modern kingdom in the ancient biblical heartland

JORDAN

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Dear Reader,

It is one hundred years since the state that is now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was founded. It could have remained a footnote in history as it was only a temporary attempt by the British mandatory power to forge a balance between various different interests and promises in the Middle East on a parcel of land that was inhospitable and poor in raw materials – but it was never designed to be permanent.

The fact that over the decades it subsequently became an anchor of stability in the political landscape of the region, despite all the tensions, can only be described as a success story. In this spirit, we would like to send our congratulations to the Kingdom and add another issue to our series of country booklets. After Lebanon and Armenia, for which we received a tremendous response from readers (see p. 28 et seq), we now turn our attention to Jordan.



The articles in this issue deal with questions that are perhaps not so often addressed in the context of this anniversary: for example, an old Christian city in Jordan, the role of Evangelical churches and the interfaith spectrum – and of course the work of the Theodor Schneller School in Amman. We are especially delighted to have won over Her Excellency Haifa Najjar, member of the Jordanian Upper House of Parliament, to pen an article on the Jordanian education system. And we get an insight into the work of the German-Jordanian Society (DJG) with which the Schneller Association has connections at various levels. For example, the two associations are each an institutional member of the other.

The Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem is also responsible for Jordan. In the meantime, a changeover has taken place here too. After 14 years in office, a solemn service took place on 23 April on the occasion of the retirement of Archbishop Suheil Dawani. At a similar festival service on 13 May, Hosam Naoum was inaugurated in office as the 15th Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem. We wish The Most Revd. Hosam good luck and God's blessing for his ministry.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Uwe Gräbe". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Uwe Gräbe

Our little mustard seed has blossomed!

*The kingdom of heaven is like
a mustard seed. Someone took the
seed and planted it in a field.*

It is the smallest of all your seeds.

*But when it grows, it is the largest of
all garden plants. It becomes a tree.*

Birds come and rest in its branches.

(Mt 13, 31-32)

There are many mustard seeds like these in the Middle East. The history of Christianity began here with us. Jesus preached about loving your neighbour, about helping, listening and giving support. That is how Christianity came into being. And like a mustard seed, the community grew.

I would like to compare Christians in the Middle East with a mustard seed. Many social institutions have come into being through them and their faith. The Arab Episcopal Church alone (Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East) has 36 institutions that help not only Christians but the entire population. Our neighbours are Muslims. They can see what Christ has taught us and the source from which we live and work. We live together in mutual respect and acceptance. This is how our mustard seeds are able to flourish.

In 2001, I was transferred by my bishop to Irbid in the north of Jordan. The parish hall was run down and the parish was very small. My wife and I thought about what we could do. We realised that blind and visually impaired children in Irbid only lived at home with their parents without any support. At the age of six, they had to attend a boarding school in Amman where they studied exclusively with other blind people. God gave us the idea to start a kindergarten where visually impaired children could learn and grow up together with sighted children.

We started in 2003 with five children. Soon we dreamed that the children would start learning Braille at the age of three and a half. This meant that, when they were six, they could start with a Braille typewriter in the first grade of one of the schools in the area. We contacted the schools but none of them wanted to take our visually impaired children. We asked God for advice.

My wife completed her studies as headmistress and we applied to the state for a public school permit. Our little mustard seed had sprouted and slowly started to grow. Today, we are the largest institution for inclusion work with visually impaired and blind children in the whole of Jordan and the second largest institution for work with the blind nationwide.

Currently, 269 students attend the school. 35 of them are visually impaired. 75 children are Christians, 194 children are Muslims. They come from Irbid and the surrounding area to study with us from kindergarten through to grade eleven.



Heidi Josua

Door of a small church in the village of Humud near Karak

Actually, this mustard seed was sown for me 28 years ago when God led me to Germany to learn German. For a long time, I wondered why I had learned this language of all languages. In Jordan, I never had the opportunity to speak German.

But when money became scarce 17 years ago because the school building had become too small and more teachers had to be hired for inclusion work, we came up with the idea of reporting about our work and the project in Germany. At last, I was able to do something with my German.

I found a lot of support from people and institutions. We received help from the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity

(EMS), the Evangelical Church in Wuerttemberg, the Evangelical Church Parish in Rottweil and others. The Niokolauspfllege institution for the blind became our partner school and helped with expertise. Many people supported us by networking with other institutions and collecting donations. This allowed our project to grow like the mustard seed in the parable.

The coronavirus pandemic is a big challenge for us. Distance learning for the blind and visually impaired is very difficult because of the lack of technical equipment. Preparing the lessons is very time-consuming. We haven't had to lay off any staff yet, but since the children don't come any more, the parents don't pay school fees. We are short of a lot of money. In the past, 10% of parents did not pay any school fees. Today, this is 40%. Fortunately, the Diocese of Jerusalem and friends in Germany provide us with financial support. This has allowed us to continue paying the teachers' salaries.

The way our Arab Episcopal School grew was no coincidence. God sowed this mustard seed 28 years ago so that it would grow and flourish. Every year, new doors open! Our dreams suddenly become possible. I often feel that God is behind us and wants to give the blind and visually impaired the chance to live their own self-determined lives.

Samir Esaid is vicar of St Mary's Anglican Church in Irbid and director and founder of the Arab Episcopal School.

The royal house guards the harmony

The situation of Christians in Jordan

Guaranteed seats in parliament, their own family law, easy church construction: Compared to many other countries in the Middle East, the situation of Christians in Jordan can be described as good. However, the situation is not free from tension.

Officially, Christians make up about 4% of the total population in Jordan. But according to current estimates, their share is now only slightly over 2%. This does not mean, however, that they have become fewer in absolute numbers. Despite emigration, the number of Christians in Jordan more than tripled from around 49,000 to 153,000 between 1950 and 1979. The fact that at the same time their percentage fell from 8.2% to 4.2% is due to the fact that they have not kept pace with the development of the total population which has grown rapidly.

The Christian part of the population lives mainly in cities such as Amman, Madaba, Fuheis, Ajlun, Kerak, Irbid and Zarka. They are allowed to build churches without any problems, the training of clergy is possible. Christians have nine guaranteed seats in the 130-member Jordanian parliament. Christians are nearly always represented in Jordanian governments. In the army, too, 4% of posts are traditionally kept free for them, but usually, they do not become members of the high command. The same applies to the civil service.



While the majority of Christians belong to an Orthodox or Catholic church, there are some historical peculiarities in the group of eleven recognised Christian communities, each of which has its own court of family law. They include the Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholics („Latins“), Greek Catholics („Melkites“), Maronites, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Copts, Anglicans, Lutherans, Seventh-day Adventists and United Pentecostals. In 2018, five more groups were registered – not as churches with their own court, but as cultural bodies. They include the Free Evangelical Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Assemblies of God, the Christian and Missionary Alliance and the Baptists.

While there are said to be around 6,500 Christians with a Muslim background in Jordan, the greatest possible care is taken to avoid missionary work among Muslims. Individual missionary groups have been expelled in the past, and time and again the package containing the Schneller magazines from Germany is delayed in customs because an overzealous official dis-



An ancient cross carved in stone and a colourful mosaic in Umm Rasas bear witness to the rich history of the ancient biblical heartland.

Heidi Josua

covered the words „Evangelical Mission“ in the sender. Most of the time, such a misunderstanding can be cleared up quickly. No-one at the Schneller School would try to turn a Muslim child into a Christian one. That is common knowledge.

Jordan is an ancient biblical heartland. The site of Jesus' baptism on the Jordan River, Mount Nebo from which Moses looked into the Promised Land, the Machaerus fortress of King Herod, the city of Jerash in the land of the Gerasenes, the land of Moab where Ruth, the biblical first mother, came from, the Jabbok where the forefather Jacob had to wrestle with God himself, the region of the Ammonites with their capital Rabat Ammon (today's Amman) and finally Pella on the Jordan River where the early church of Jerusalem found refuge when the Romans destroyed their city – all these sites make the Christian population of Jordan proud to live where their faith once originated.

In Jordan you very often hear the grateful phrase: „Harmony between Christians and Muslims is watched over by the Royal

Family.“ There is even an official „Day of Harmony“. This should not be underestimated. There are many issues that create tension in the Hashemite Kingdom. Since 1967 at the latest, the balance of influence between the traditional Jordanian tribal society and the (predominantly Palestinian) urban middle class has been constantly redressed – by the way, this even happens within the Jordanian Royal Family itself and recently led to some confusing news from the palace.

Society is marked by the existence of several influential extended families (Hamouleh). Besides broad layers of the population who live in abject poverty, there is also a small, very well-off upper class.

The fact that Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994 was never approved of by large parts of the population. As a result, Jordanian politics today has to manoeuvre between those who would like to join the momentum that has recently emerged between Israel and other Arab states – and others who see this as a colonial manoeuvre on the backs of the Palestinians. It is really a good thing that, despite all this, peace at least between the religious communities is guaranteed by the Royal Family.

Uwe Gräbe

Christian tradition, a unique flair

Despite their differences, the people in Al Fuheis practise good coexistence

Al Fuheis is a small town 15 kilometres west of Amman. On a clear day, you can even see Jerusalem from there. Despite many changes, the town has been able to maintain its unique flair.

Al Fuheis has a higher percentage of university graduates than any other town in Jordan. There are two local high schools, one belonging to the Roman Catholic Church, the other to the Greek Orthodox Church. Private church institutions have a better infrastructure and equipment than state schools. The majority of the 20,000 inhabitants of Al Fuheis are Christians of various denominations. The largest is the Greek Orthodox Church followed by the Roman Catholic Church. There is also a Greek Catholic parish as well as Baptists and free churches.

For 40 years, Al Fuheis has celebrated Christmas on 25 December and Easter according to the Greek Orthodox calendar. The fact that Christians of different church traditions, who calculate their feasts based on different calendars, agree on common days is something quite remarkable in the Middle East. In Jordan, Al Fuheis has played a pioneering role here. Today, this arrangement applies to all churches throughout the country.

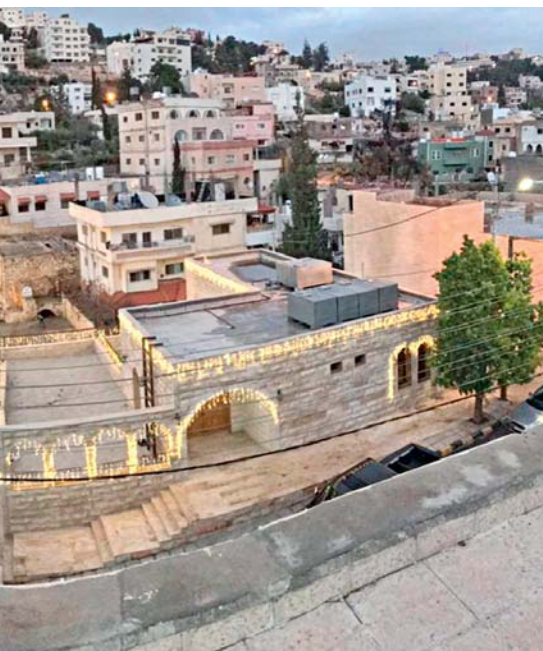
Good cooperation is also evident at funerals, weddings and other church and non-church occasions. The clergy of all denominations in Al Fuheis takes part. The highlight every year is the Good Fri-



One of the churches in Al Fuheis is decorated for Christmas. On December 25 was launched from the parishes of this town.

day procession which starts at the Roman Catholic Church in the old town and ends with a joint service in the cemetery. Representatives of partner communities, such as the Arab Lutheran congregation and Anglican parish, always take part.

In Al Fuheis, refugees are greeted with open arms. This has a historical background. In April 1918, all Christians from Al Fuheis were forced to flee on foot to Jerusalem and Bethlehem before the advancing Ottomans. This event is now imprinted in the collective memory. In recent years, many Christian families from Iraq and Syria have found a new home in Al Fuheis. The willingness of the inhabitants to integrate refugees and give them work has been overwhelming. Many only



fuheis.net/Ahed Al Farah

The initiative that all denominations celebrate Christmas

stayed until the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) could arrange for them to continue their journey to Europe, Canada, Australia or America. But their cultural and religious contribution was an enrichment for the whole city.

Al Fuheis is also known as a cultural city. The annual „Al Fuheis Cultural Festival“ has become one of the largest in the Middle East. Several galleries and restaurants have become meeting places for people of different nationalities and religions. Cultural events and socio-political panel discussions make Al Fuheis into a popular destination.

Tolerance and interfaith dialogue have given further stimulus to the ethical de-

bate on the contribution to peaceful co-existence. The emphasis on stressing common ground and treating differences with respect are the foundation for good neighbourliness and for peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims. The fact that this is also appreciated by the Royal Family is shown by the fact that Queen Rania Abdullah or Crown Prince Hussein bin Abdullah take over the patronage of the celebration every year when the Christmas tree is raised.

I am writing this article as the coronavirus pandemic is spreading in Jordan and there have already been several deaths in Al Fuheis. The political, economic and social situation in Jordan is also very difficult.

The emigration of Christians from the Middle East is also making itself felt in Al Fuheis. Many families have found new homes in America, Canada or Australia. Their old churches in the middle of the old village centre are the landmark of a large community with different denominations looking to the future. Many Christians see themselves as the salt of the earth. But their future depends on developments in the Middle East and Jordan.

Musa Al-Munaizel is a board member of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools and comes from Al Fuheis. From 2004 to 2011, he was educational advisor at the Theodor Schneller School and during this time he lived in his natal town.

Initiators of interfaith dialogue

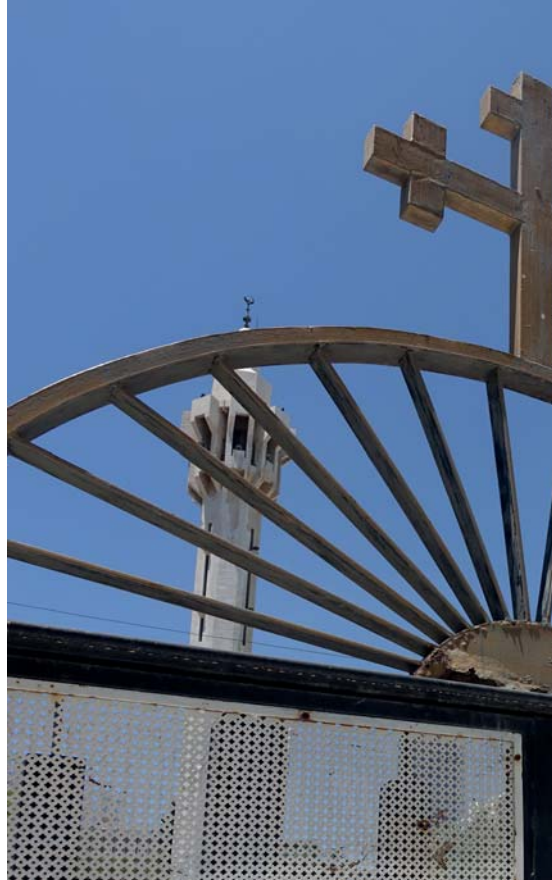
Why the Royal Family sees itself committed to religious tolerance

Next to the modern King Abdullah Mosque in Amman stands the equally modern Coptic Orthodox Church. This is more than a symbol. The Jordanian state together with its Royal Family is committed to religious tolerance and the coexistence of cultures despite all the tensions in the Middle East.

I was able to take part in Jordan's biggest interfaith event in 1999. More than a thousand participants from all over the world and all religions attended the 7th World Assembly of the international movement Religions for Peace. King Abdullah II gave an impassioned speech at the opening. He said that the Middle East – as the cradle of Judaism, Christianity and Islam – must give completely new signals of understanding; that the Holy Land – and of course Jerusalem in particular – belongs to no-one exclusively but should become a pilgrimage site of peace for the world!

This conference was an important step on the arduous path towards peace between religions. Without this, there can be no peace between nations, especially not in the Middle East. And there is still great irreconcilability among the population towards Israel with whom Jordan has since long made peace at state level.

This explains the continuity of the initiative for understanding coming from Jor-



dan. In 1994, Prince Hassan bin Talal, the King's uncle, founded the Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies. He initiated peace talks on several occasions.

Another milestone was the open letter "A Common Word" initiated in 2007 by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, signed by 138 leading Muslim personalities and sent to almost all leading Christian personalities (www.acommonword.com, also in German). It centres on the basic statement that Jews, Christians and Muslims have a great common heritage in the double commandment of the love of God and one's neighbour. This commandment is inextricably linked to the search for justice and religious freedom. The success of the so-called Islamic State (IS) showed how



Good neighbours:
The Coptic Church in Amman stands right next to the large King Abdullah Mosque.

non-based Adyan Foundation, highlights that several other institutions in Jordan – such as the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought – are striving to instil an interfaith impetus to further sustainable development work and strengthen the civil society. It is a matter of transferring good intentions and declarations into the everyday practice of attitudes and behaviour. It is especially important to reach the youth who have articulated their expectations and hopes for tolerance and openness in the context of the “Arab Spring”.

And last but not least, there are great challenges in school education to work more towards interfaith understanding. The Theodor Schneller School, where Christian and Islamic religious education have been exchanging ideas for many years, is still a special case for this future task.

One of the recommendations coming from the Amman-based Catholic Centre for Studies and Media is to install a satellite for broadcasting television programmes that could promote interfaith dialogue and sustainable developments. However, it would also be important to take advantage of local conditions and practical possibilities that could be used to address the younger generation in particular.

Prof. Dr Johannes Lähnemann has been involved in interfaith dialogue for many decades on various committees and in several functions. From 2006 to 2018, he was a board member of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools.

strongly these statements can be contested. An interfaith coalition also took a stand against it. In a statement from Amman on 24 July 2014, it said: “In these dark times, when we are witnessing a moral crisis of unparalleled dimensions, we should raise awareness of the Islamic concept of “haq el hurriya” and “haq el karama” (the right to freedom and the right to human dignity), which people of all faiths should enjoy.”

Interfaith dialogue in Jordan is still largely seen as the concern of a small elite. That is why the Royal Institute for Interfaith Dialogue, under its current director Wajih Kanso, is trying to make a greater impact on Jordanian society as a whole. A recent study on interfaith dialogue in the Middle East, conducted by the Leba-

Heidi Josua

Building bridges between cultures

Active for almost 60 years: the German-Jordanian Society

Ahlan wa sahlan! (welcome) In Jordan, our welcome is always hearty and joyful. Even a whole tour group is no problem. Pour water in the soup and welcome everyone! But Jordan is not only a welcoming nation, it is also immensely diverse.

Hospitality permeates the whole of Jordanian society. What seems like an anachronism to us in Germany is perfectly normal in Jordan. Our Jordanian hosts serve up so many delicacies that it can sometimes become a little scary!

Jordan is a multi-ethnic state that celebrates its centenary in 2021. Despite its extremely scarce natural resources and problematic relations with its neighbours, the country is doing very well with its monarchy. It is legitimised by the succession from the house of the Prophet Mohammed and at the same time sees itself as the guardian of the memorial sites of Islam and Christianity in Jerusalem. Jordan is a biblical country that has an impressive list of memorials, such as the site of Jesus' baptism, Mount Moses and Byzantine cities boasting magnificent mosaics in the ancient churches.

The Royal Family appreciates and recognises the living history and culture of Christianity. As a symbolic gesture in 2008, King Abdullah II granted seven Christian congregations the land around the historic site of Jesus' baptism on the Jordan River to build churches. His father, King Hussein, appointed the Christian Mamdouh Bisharat, a childhood friend, as the

sole Grand Duke of Jordan. The most important Christian holidays in Jordan also apply to the vast Muslim majority. Sometimes you can even see decorated Christmas trees in Muslim homes. In short, Jordan enjoys peaceful coexistence between religions within the same cultural context.

On the other hand, no other country in the world has taken in as many refugees as Jordan. In 1948 and 1967, it accepted 2.2 million Palestinians. During the Gulf wars, many people came to the country from Iraq and since 2011, another 1.6 million fled from Syria. This has placed a heavy burden on the 10 million Jordanians. But there was always a collective solidarity to welcome the people. Unfor-



Nabiel Khubeis

Sand bottles at a souvenir stand, a symbol of Jordan: Grains

tunately, due to the pandemic, many in Jordan like everywhere else in the world are struggling with high unemployment and existential fear.

In 1963, King Hussein and Honorary Consul Kurt Uihlein founded the German-Jordanian Society (DJG). Originally intended as an aid organisation for refugees, it was able to alleviate the refugees' plight with donations. Through encounter trips and a lively youth exchange, the culture and history of the country have been impressively publicised to this day and many become friends of Jordan. Travelers admire and support the achievements made by the Theodor Schneller School. Since its opening in 1966, it has been regarded as a beacon project.

DJG also supports other charitable Christian institutions in Jordan, such as

Birgit Gassmann's "Center of Hope" in Amman, an institution for children and young people with mental disabilities. Mrs Gassmann finances her remarkable work only through donations and impresses through her trust in God and selfless commitment. DJG also supports bilateral projects, such as the "Amali" project, which means "my hope", in cooperation with the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the Center for International Migration and Development (CIM). Women start-up entrepreneurs in Jordan are supported with courses on how to set up a business and build a mentor network.

Other projects emerge from our encounter trips, such as the visit of a travel group from the Karlsruhe University of Education to an UNRWA refugee school in Camp Hussein. A spontaneous collection was made for urgently needed musical instruments for gifted pupils.

When we organised a memorable concert tour by the Johann Strauss Orchestra to historical sites such as the Hercules Temple in Amman, the Dead Sea, the Baptism Site as well as in Aqaba on the Red Sea, we succeeded in demonstrating our intercultural work through the unifying language of music which created a wave of sympathy among the audiences. We are currently planning a project on waste management with the One World Network, the German-Jordanian University and the Center of Hope. We want to continue building bridges between cultures in the future.

Nabiel Khubeis is the Executive Chairman of the German-Jordanian Society.



of sand of many different colours make colourful pictures.

The chance to tread exceptional paths

Reflection on the pandemic and educational policy in Jordan

Humans are Jordan's most invaluable asset. The resourcefulness of our human capacity will always be our main source of hope and reassurance. This applies in particular to the education sector which must tread new paths in times of the pandemic.

The pandemic has dictated our school doors to close across the Kingdom but it has opened virtual doors that, although intangible, are doors



Haifa Najjar: "Educators are a most invaluable asset."

of hope and possibility. The national movement to online learning has demanded immense efforts from educators to relearn how to educate across the internet. This has not been an easy journey to experience as it has taken everybody out of their comfort zones and placed them at many points of high tension.

The challenge also varied in intensity with the different economic capacities of different households. The pandemic posed the dilemma of prioritizing health at the expense of learning, and we know that such a tradeoff involves loss. Additionally, the economic divide has made it even more difficult with the varying quality of educational services offered.

The public opinion on educational policies devised during this period has also

been divided and debatable. Nevertheless, Jordan has been able to enforce an achievable minimum with much lessons to learn for the future. And that is an asset made possible by our teaching task force and the increasing involvement of parents in the process.

Vaccination efforts are on the rise to support educational endeavors, particularly with a promise to prioritize educational personnel, so that a return to schools will become feasible in the near future. And despite the uncertainty of when this will happen, increased efforts are made to envision many possible scenarios.

Having established a rather solid infrastructure for online learning, and becoming more literate and attuned to synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid models, educators, students, parents, and educational policy makers are learning and relearning patience, and acquiring an experimental/experiential spirit. This will manifest itself in the future in form of new educational policies, more choices, and further opportunities to improve.

Under exceptional circumstances, policy making becomes exceptional; hence, educational policy is passing through a transitional period under Jordanian martial laws currently effective during the pandemic. And while we need not blind our eyes to the temporariness or even arbitrariness of such a condition, we also need to see the potential of such a situation in devising new educational policy that is in favor of learners and learning.



If you want to write, you must first learn the alphabet. This also applies in times of a pandemic.

Generally speaking, our educational policy in Jordan, as in many other parts of the world, has not accommodated for untraditional educational paths before. This deprives those with special circumstances from opportunities that can enhance their educational endeavors. Accordingly, with the potential of stretching educational policies to accommodate for untraditional learning paths, we will be better able to diversify and differentiate learning to meet the needs of more learners.

The pandemic has unrobed us in ways that might appear to be unfavorable in many ways. Media carries many unnerv-

ing reports of the poor conditions of education, health care, policies, and living conditions in Jordan that put one under an impression that the situation is devastating and irredeemable. However, there are always at least two sides if not more to a story. We still need to learn how to validate what we hear and see.

We still need to know how to sift what is accountable from what is not. We still need to ask good questions and hold back judgments. We still need to accustom ourselves to alternative thinking and generating alternative solutions. But we are on that path. We continue to learn and hope and unlearn, and relearn. Jordan is a center for hope; and educators are its most in-

valuable asset in the present and the future of the country. It is their resourcefulness that will continue to be our main source of hope and reassurance.

Haifa Najjar is Senator in the Upper House of Parliament of Jordan. She is director of the Anglican Ahliyyah School for Girls and the Bishop's School for Boys in Amman and member of the Administrative Board of the Theodor Schneller School.

A minority of a minority

The situation of Evangelical Christians in Jordan

Jordan recognises five Evangelical denominations: Baptist, Nazarene, Assemblies of God, Evangelical Alliance and the Evangelical Free Church. However, as opposed to their Orthodox, Lutheran and Catholic brethren, they are not registered as churches but cultural entities under the ministries of social affairs, culture or justice.

Evangelicals might number as few as 10,000 in the Middle Eastern monarchy of 10 million. When they marry, divorce and inherit, they go through the religious courts of another recognised denomination, which can breed conflict. "Jordanian Evangelicals are a minority of a minority of a minority," says Dr Imad Shehadeh. He is founder and president of the Jordan Evangelical Theological Seminary (JETS) that graduates 25 theology students a year who become clergy in Evangelical churches in Jordan, the region and Arab congregations overseas.

Shehadeh expects new neighbours this year at the picturesque campus location outside Amman, not far from the Royal Residence. The Whitman Academy has outgrown its location in west Amman. It started as a school for the children of JETS professors and developed into an independent Evangelical school. Baptists, Nazarenes and the Evangelical Free churches already run grade schools but once the Whitman Academy has moved, as Dr Shehadeh points out, "There will be Evangelical education from KG to doctoral level all on the same campus."



A rock chapel in the so called „Evangelical Complex“ in Salt.

Julia Nuqul, co-founder and current primary level principal, talks about what unites and motivates Evangelicals in Jordan: The hope to be recognised as churches by the state with their own religious courts, but also a vibrant Sunday school and youth movement, and, actually, education itself. In this way, the Evangelical community radiates into wider society. Like other Christian education institutions, Evangelical schools have a reputation for academic rigour. Some JETS graduates have become lecturers in secular universities in Jordan and the region.



Heidi Josua

al churches. “We do want to be united, but we also must say that there are differences,” says Dr Shehadeh. Evangelicals are seen as rootless in the region. Especially to Orthodox Christians, who claim uninterrupted presence since apostolic times, the young Evangelical movement dating back less than 200 years seems very recent and foreign.

A contentious issue is that Evangelicals steal people from other churches. “We do!” Shehadeh seems to freely admit to the crime first but then adds: “It is because people are spiritually hungry.” The Protestant theology of salvation through faith alone and a reduction of tradition and doctrine to ‘sola scriptura’ is attractive to many. What is stealing of sheep to one, is growing of grass to another.

Traditional churches also object to the Evangelical insistence on preaching to Muslims. Religious freedom in Jordan covers free practice of one’s faith and conversion to Islam. But, like in many other Muslim countries, conversion from Islam is seen as apostasy. While not criminalised, it impacts on civil status matters and is generally thought to disturb the peace.

The list of differences doesn’t end here. Differing views on eschatology, Israel, the sacraments and divorce overshadow any hope for ecumenical harmony anytime soon. “We want to be one,” Shehadeh says, “but we also can’t seem to stop asking each other to change our ways and doctrine.”

Covid-19 struck Jordan hard. Twice in a row, Holy Week saw neither the lively processions of the Orthodox nor the passionate worship choruses of the Evangelicals. On Good Fridays in previous years, some

Nuqul adds the benefits for social cohesion: Muslim students in their schools experience the religious ‘other’ at first hand and this helps to break down unhelpful stereotypes. But is this not also true when Evangelical children attend majority Muslim schools? Nuqul hesitates. “In theory it should be. In public schools they learn a lot about Islam by exposure but also get marginalised by their Muslim peers.”

The relationship of Evangelicals to the Muslim majority is not always easy, and neither is the relationship to the tradition-

Jordanian Christians attended both: an Evangelical worship service and the late-night Orthodox procession. Some sheep decide themselves to which flock they want to belong, and maybe it's both.

And as the month of Ramadan cycles through the year, overlapping with Lent every three decades, Muslims and Christians will fast together in 2022. Maybe there is hope for



Ekkhardt Sonntag

Only a small sign is indicating this evangelical congregation.

ecumenical and inter-faith integration in Jordan which includes Evangelicals, a small group with a disproportionately large impact on education and other parts of public lifes.

Ekkardt Sonntag is Programme Advisor on Theology and Church Development at Danmission in Jordan.

Constitution and Religion in Jordan

The Constitution of Jordan of 1.1.1952 includes a whole series of articles with direct or indirect relevance to the issue of religious freedom.

Article 2: Islam is the religion of the State and Arabic is its official language.

Article 6 (1): Jordanians shall be equal before the law with no discrimination between them in rights and duties even if they differ in race, language or religion.

Article 14: The State shall safeguard the free exercise of the rites of religions and creeds in accordance with the customs observed in the Kingdom, if such is not inconsistent with public order or morality.

Article 19: Congregations shall have the right to establish and maintain their own schools for the education of their own members provided that they comply with the general provisions of the law and be subject to the Government control in their curricula and orientation.

Article 28 (e): It is a condition for the person who shall ascend the Throne to be a Moslem, mentally sound, born by a legitimate wife, and of Moslem parents.

Article 99: The courts are of three types: 1. Civil Courts 2. Religious Courts 3. Special Courts

Article 104: Religious Courts shall be divided into: 1. The Sharia Courts 2. The Tribunals of other Religious Communities

Article 105: The Sharia Courts alone shall have the jurisdiction – in accordance with their own laws – in the following matters: 1. Matters of personal status of Moslems.

Article 109 (1): The Tribunals of Religious Communities shall be composed in conformity with the provisions of laws issued pertaining thereto. In such laws the jurisdictions of said Tribunals shall be defined as regards matters of personal status and (Waqfs) constituted for the benefit of the community concerned. However, matters of personal status of such community shall be the matters of personal status of Moslems within the jurisdiction of the Sharia Courts.

Article 106: Sharia Courts shall in their jurisdiction apply the provisions of the Sharia.

Article 108: The Tribunals of Religious Communities are the tribunals of the non-Moslem religious communities that have been or will be recognised by the Government as established in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Source: https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Jordan_2011.pdf

Contact with parents has become closer

How the TSS stays on course during the pandemic

Actually, the focus this year at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Jordan should have been on supporting children with learning difficulties and on the new training courses in hair-dressing, hospitality and motor vehicle electrics. But then came the pandemic and with it a totally different set of challenges.

Suddenly it was necessary to set up a learning platform on the Internet, train the staff in how to use it and provide the children with digital access. The whole gamut of teaching situations that we experienced in Germany or Switzerland also occurred in Jordan: in-presence, online or hybrid, in alternating shifts and then, despite all efforts, nothing at all; sometimes the children were able to return to the boarding home, sometimes they had

to stay with their families – no matter how difficult the conditions are at home.

Above all, it was important to start very simply with the basics. “Sometimes we even had to bring the children’s stationery home,” says Rev. Dr Khaled Freij, the school’s Director. As a result, contact with the families has become much closer. There were many occasions when TSS staff succeeded in training families to allow their children to attend classes.

Nader, for example. He’s six years old and his father is chronically ill and blind. But in cooperation with his family, they managed to set up the mother’s smartphone as Nader’s access to school. Even though access to school for him is like ‘the eye of the needle’, the boy has at least been able to improve his reading, writing and arithmetic skills,



Remedial classes still take place despite the coronavirus restrictions. (Photo taken before the pandemic.)

722,754
confirmed cases



Chart showing the development of Covid-19 in Jordan from 3.1.2020 to 14.5.2021: The peaks of the second and third waves were in November 2020 and March 2021. 9,203 people have died from the virus.

despite the pandemic. But sometimes the family doesn't even have a mobile phone. As in Tara's case, for example, a ten-year-old girl who has four brothers. The school team had to go all out to try to find a cheap tablet from somewhere or other. But that worked out too, somehow.

The number of private sessions with the school psychologist has risen during this crisis. And sport has suddenly taken on a whole new role. For example, the sports teacher suddenly posted aerobics lessons online and there were times when the pupil's family even joined in doing the exercises. Religious education – neatly separated into Christian and Muslim children as is customary in Jordan – also continues to take place. Unfortunately, only music lessons have been left out; the many beautiful instruments which were purchased from a donation given by the Württemberg Church have not been used yet.

Actually, it is almost a miracle that schooling and training have taken place at all during the pandemic. After all, 100% of the income from the TSS guesthouse has been lost since March 2020 as well as 45% of the income from the (already low) school fees. But many donors have helped by contributing to the Coronavirus Aid of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) and the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) so that all teachers can continue to receive their salaries. It leaves you speechless and grateful!

So, what are the focuses of school life? The Director attaches great importance on continuing the remedial classes for the children with particular learning difficulties. The so-called "resources room", which was equipped for this purpose only a few years ago thanks to a generous donation, offers enough space for use under Covid-19 conditions. Similarly, the vocational training workshops are so large and airy that they can be used again and again under strict conditions even if the school's classrooms have long since had to close.

Yes, there have certainly been changes to vocational training at the TSS. The traditional training courses in carpentry, car workshop and metal workshop met with repeated difficulties. The classic model of offering outstanding training independently in a country that is hardly able to do so itself – this model is no longer workable today. New, additional training courses have been developed in close cooperation with the government agencies responsible for vocational training. And the government recognition of qualifications is a more valuable asset today than a certificate that simply says "Schneller School". Even if much of what the government does could certainly be improved. The management of the TSS deserves a lot of credit for the fact that this cooperation works even in times of crisis and that all qualifications are recognised.

Uwe Gräbe

Group shaves off their hair

Alumni reminisce

14 years ago, Christian Kißling worked as a volunteer in one of the residential groups at the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman. Today, the 34-year-old vocational school teacher is treasurer of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS). The experiences he had at the TSS were very formative for him, he says.

What experience from your time as volunteer will you never forget?

One day, I shaved my head bald in honour of the educator Bishara Tannous, whose boarding group I was helping to look after. That night, however, our boys

my boys became a father just a few months ago. Another lives in Hamburg and works as an Arab singer. I still remember how he often sang early in the morning when I wasn't really awake yet. But there are also boys who I have sadly lost contact with. I had a very good relationship with one boy who needed more support. I'd really like to meet him again. As well as all the other boys and the teachers, of course. I was last at the school in 2010.

Why do you still feel connected to the Schneller work even after so long?

The experience shaped my life so much that it is an important part of my career. I

private
Christian Kißling
(3rd from left),
the educator
Bishara Tannous
(3rd from right)
and some of the
boys from the
boarding school –
all with the same
„hairstyle“.



followed my example. And the next day, there was a big outing so that the whole school could “admire” us. To this day, I have no idea what the boys’ parents thought about this caper.

Who would you like to meet again from that time?

Fortunately, I am connected with many of them on Facebook. So, I at least keep up to date a little on how they are doing and where they live now. For example, one of

am so happy I can serve on the Executive Board of the Association and support this important work.

Should your children or the children of friends one day decide to also do voluntary service at the Schneller School, what would you advise them not to do under any circumstances?

Shave your hair off!

Every child is important

How the Schneller school supports children during the pandemic

A school year marked by many difficult conditions is drawing to a close at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Khirbet Kanafar. On the one hand, online lessons had to be organised and on the other, individual solutions had to be found for children from extremely poor families.

For Ahmad, Ali and Amir*, the new school year began last autumn but with a delay. While all the other children and young people returned to the school and boarding home after the long summer break, the three brothers were absent for the first three weeks. The staff tried in vain to reach their father. He apparently didn't want to talk to the school. When they finally reached him and asked why the boys were not coming to school, he confessed that he did not have enough money for schoolbooks.

Fortunately, by this time, the Lebanese Ministry of Education had already posted all the textbooks online so that everyone could download them onto a smartphone or tablet for free. No-one would have to spend any money on textbooks this school year. And with the support of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools as well as the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity, the school purchased tablets for all the boarding students so that all the children and young people could both follow the digital lessons and always have all the teaching materials at their disposal. The father of the three sons promised

to send them back to school the following week. But on the following Monday in November, they still had not shown up. On the phone the father explained that he could not even pay the administrative fee amounting to the equivalent of 4 dollars per child.

As a result of the banking and financial crisis in Lebanon, the value of the Lebanese pound had dropped so much that wages and salaries are often not even enough to cover the bare essentials. Even people who used to belong to the reasonably well-off middle class now have problems paying the extremely high prices for food and other daily necessities.

The school granted the father an instalment payment until the end of the school year. Since then, the children have been living in the boarding home again, attending classes at school and playing with their friends. However, only for one week at a time after which they spend the following week at home. A coronavirus "blended model" of learning was also introduced at the JLSS by halving groups and classes.

The example of Hassan, Khoulood and Douaa* shows how important for children to be with others of their own age, especially for children from extremely poor backgrounds. Until last autumn, life as the three siblings aged six to nine knew it consisted of living in a tent. Both parents were unable to work for various reasons. The children's uncle was the family's only support.

* Names of the children have been changed



With the help of the EMS and EVS, every child at the Schneller School has his/her own tablet.

When the children started school, they had to learn a lot of very basic everyday things, such as how to use a toilet properly. Even when they ate, the educators had to patiently explain to them how to eat with cutlery. They learned what it means to shower and that you wash yourself every morning and brush your teeth after every meal. They even had to be taught how to hold a pen. At the start, it was extremely

tough going for the other children at the boarding home, for the educators and for the siblings themselves. But the three of them made progress very quickly. After three weeks, they had settled in and adapted so well that they found friends to play with, just like all the other children at the boarding home.

Katja Dorothea Buck

Four partners for one school

JLSS, EVS, EMS and the Beirut Church sign new agreement

Many a lengthy process comes to an end just when it is hardly expected due to the adverse conditions. Despite the severe crisis in Lebanon, the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS), the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS), the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and its member, the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, signed a new cooperation agreement in March.

But first, some vital points require urgent clarification: The church in Beirut, an EMS member, is the sponsor and operator of the JLSS. The EVS, also an EMS member, supports and funds the JLSS and also advises the EMS on Middle East matters. The JLSS is run by a local Administrative Board chaired by the pastor of the Beirut Church; the church has six to eight seats and the EVS and EMS have two seats. On the other hand, the EVS is now committed to granting its Lebanese partners representation on the Association's Executive Committee.

In addition, the properties of the JLSS, which were not properly registered to date, are to be entered in the land register in the name of the Beirut church. In order to raise the funds for the very costly and lengthy registration process, the church is allowed to sell smaller parcels of the land in close consultation with the EVS. Moreover, the land may only be used for purposes that safeguard the operation of the JLSS.

The JLSS is primarily aimed at children and young people from broken families and poor backgrounds, as well as orphans

and half-orphans, regardless of religion, denomination or gender. If the Beirut Church ever wants to found another institution that is predominantly aimed at exactly this target group, then the EVS can make its registered trademark "Schneller School" available to it for this purpose.

The last valid cooperation agreement concerning the JLSS dated from 1952. Although there were drafts for a new version in 1980 and 1984, they were never signed by all the parties involved due to the turmoil of the Lebanese civil war (1975 to 1990) and the need to redefine the role of the EVS within the EMS.

A comparison of the texts of the time shows the urgent need for the new agreement. According to the 1952 agreement, the school was run exclusively by the Schneller Association (then called the "Evangelical Association for the Syrian Orphanage"); it was even explicitly stated that the "local committee" (the forerunner of today's Administrative Board) was not allowed to interfere in the "internal affairs" of the school. Its function was at best to represent – something that is inconceivable today!

In the 1980 draft, the responsibility for the school was transferred from the EVS to the Beirut Church – and this was ratified by the Beirut Church Council on 7





EMS/Gräbe

The Johann Ludwig Schneller School rests on the basis of a solid partnership between the Schneller Association, the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity and the National Evangelical Church of Beirut.

the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan. In it, the EVS disappears completely as an independent partner. Only with difficulty was it possible to reintroduce it into the latest version of 2014, at least alongside the EMS.

Another consideration runs through the documents of 1952, 1980 and 1984. It was always planned that the properties of the JLSS should be registered in the name of the Beirut Church. However, the Schneller Association was to pay for this registration. As lengthy and expensive as the registration process has proven to be since then, it would have been the financial ruin of the EVS if the Lebanese partners had insisted on it.

After seven years of negotiations, all four partners involved have now signed an agreement. Now in Lebanon we will have to consider together how funds can be raised from the extensive land of the JLSS to finally register all the plots correctly. The EVS, in turn, will have to consider how, as part of a progressive internationalisation of the EMS, it can make it possible for the Beirut church to take up its contractually guaranteed seat on the Executive Board of the Association.

Uwe Gräbe

July 1980 but never countersigned by the German partners. Instead, a 1984 draft was made in which the EMS declared that it had assumed all the functions of the EVS and was now entering into a partnership with the Beirut Church in place of the EVS – which included shared responsibility for the school between the EMS and the local Administrative Council. The Schneller Association would have been out of the picture altogether. How fortunate that this was never ratified by the Lebanese!

What was conceived at the time as part of the decolonisation and the planned dissolution of the EVS into the EMS comes to light in the parallel agreement of 1990 with the Anglican partners concerning

Don't be misled by small numbers

EMS Near East Liaison Desk moderates international partner consultation of the NEST

The Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut provides a well-grounded theological training. But because the churches in the Middle East are shrinking, the small seminary is facing ever greater challenges. At a virtual round table, representatives from organisations around the world met to find ways out of the trough.

Lebanon is imploding. Hyperinflation, a collapsed banking and economic system, political erosion, humanitarian misery, environmental disasters... and in the middle of it all, the NEST. When the building in the Hamra district was severely damaged by the explosion in Beirut harbour in early August 2020, many friends around the world helped with donations. But the difficulties at the NEST go much deeper. The local Protestant churches, which normally train their young theologians there, are sending fewer and fewer students.

For those responsible locally, it may be of some help that the NEST is part of a worldwide network of befriended organisations that believe it is important for good theological training to take place in the Middle East in particular – in the region where Christianity has its origins; where Western and Eastern churches are part of a unique ecumenism; where the challenges of Christian-Muslim coexistence have come to light much earlier than in Europe or America.

Delegates from eleven organisations in seven countries on three continents came together to attend a virtual round table to reflect on the future of the NEST.

This worldwide network showed itself on 11 March. 21 delegates from eleven organisations in seven countries on three continents came together to attend a virtual round table moderated by the Middle East Liaison Desk of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS). The EMS sends a group of students to NEST every year through the SiMO programme (Studies in the Middle East).

The last “international partner’s consultation” was eight years ago. At the time, only a small number of those now gathered were able to travel to Beirut. As early as 2013, the college president, Dr George Sabra, described the institution’s difficulties: too few students, few local teachers, too little money. Plans have been drafted in recent years to merge NEST with an-





EMS/Weiß/Unsplash/Keiper [M]

other university. But the local Protestant churches did not want to relinquish the independence of their seminary. Moreover, the situation for the NEST had improved in the meantime, ironically because of the Syrian war which had driven many talented young people to Lebanon to study.

But now? “The churches in the Middle East are not growing,” Sabra explained. “They have no more vacant pastorates to offer.” And among the young people in the churches, he said, fewer and fewer are willing to study theology. Of the 19 students currently at the NEST, only five are preparing for a pastorate in one of these churches. Next year, there will probably still be three, and in two years’ time, there will possibly be no-one left.

Sabra, however, does not want to be misled by such small numbers. The NEST has had to struggle many times in its history but things have always turned up for the best. Couldn’t the trough now be bridged again – with special programmes for international students, for example?

“For us, the NEST is a hub of international ecumenical learning,” said the delegate from the Netherlands. “As Protestants, we need the connection to the Eastern churches and for us the NEST represents that bridge.” The dialogue with Protestant church leaders in Beirut must therefore be intensified, she said – not least to encourage them to submit a plan for how many young people from their ranks are likely to study at the NEST in the coming years.

“In any case, we still hope to send theology students and pastors to the NEST for further training in the future,” said two delegates from Germany. Perhaps the number of students could be increased by cooperation with several regional German churches.

“We will post a video clip to draw attention to the situation of our brothers and sisters in Lebanon,” added the delegate from the American Presbyterians, one of the institutions that once had established NEST. “And we are trying to send students as well,” added the delegate from the American Lutheran Church finally.

It was a joyful encouraging meeting that ended with a prayer of blessing.

Uwe Gräbe


Time for verbal disarmament

An obituary and a review

On 18 February, the historian Dr Reiner Bernstein died in Munich after a serious illness at the age of 82. With his passing, we not only lose a clever contender in the debate on the Middle East conflict but also a fine level-headed person.

His life's passion was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Judaism in all its facets. He also cooperated on many occasions with German-speaking Protestant associations and churches active in this field. I like to think back to our meetings ten or fifteen years ago when he and his wife Judith were frequent guests at the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem speaking to various groups in support of the "Geneva Initiative" – probably the most convincing model of a two-state solution to date. At that time, he was the spokesperson for this initiative. Or to the Middle East Conference in Bad Boll in 2015 when we attempted together with many young people to depart from the well-trodden paths of the various Middle East conflicts and reflect on the potential of civil societies in countries such as Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Israel.

Doing only what others expected of him was never Bernstein's thing anyway. When we asked him to write about the Palestinians for our issue on "Peoples without a State" (SM 2/2020), he took the liberty of writing about the changing role of Israel's Arab citizens – and not, as expected, about the West Bank and Gaza. A few months be-



Reiner Bernstein with his book „Der verborgene Frieden“ (The Hidden Peace) in which he examined the entanglement between religion and politics in the Middle East conflict in 2000.

fore his death, Reiner Bernstein became a member of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS).

A few days before his death, Bernstein left the public a very fine booklet which was far too short due to his illness. "Allen Anfeindungen zum Trotz" (Despite all hostility) – these are memoirs and reflections on the Israel-Palestine conflict that have a pleasantly level-headed effect in a context where correct convictions often seem to count more than profound knowledge infused with life experience but where some contemporaries feel they have to make their own loud contribution to the general cacophony after just one or two study trips to the Holy Land.

In this autobiographical sketch, Bernstein takes a brief look at his childhood



Karlheinz Egginger

and youth before throwing some light on how he virtually took a severe bashing when he was the managing director of the Bonn office of the young German-Israeli Society during a dispute over the political orientation of the organisation; how he then found his place in the German-Israeli Working Group for Peace in the Middle East (DIAK) and in Protestant adult education; how he became the spokesperson for the “Geneva Initiative” in Germany together with his wife Judith; and how he ultimately lost all hope for a two-state solution. Above all, however, readers learn a lot about the sometimes brutal hostility that the Bernstein couple had to endure along the way.

Yes, it is certainly possible to disagree with Bernstein’s ideas on a number of points. One does not have to agree with

everything, and above all one would have to take a similarly critical look at the Palestinian leadership, as he does in this book concerning the various Israeli governments. Under no circumstances, however, should one avoid a sober and non-polemical discussion of Bernstein’s arguments. Because that was Bernstein’s strength – leading an objective and level-headed discussion and wrestling for the best argument. It was a pleasure discussing with him – even if one did not share the same opinion. One can only guess how many wounds Bernstein received from those who think that the basic rules of human interaction are immediately suspended whenever it comes to Israel and Palestine. But perhaps, in retrospect, this is what remains of the life that he lived – the realisation that it is time for verbal disarmament.

Uwe Gräbe



**Reiner Bernstein:
Allen Anfeindungen
zum Trotz**

Deutschland – Israel –
Palästina: Meine Bilanz
Mit einem Nachwort von
Judith Bernstein
AphorismA Verlag,
Berlin 2021
62 Seiten, 10 Euro

Letters to the editors

Rarely have we received so much feedback from an issue of the Schneller magazine as we did with our Armenia issue. We would like to thank all those who wrote to us and we can only publish excerpts from the flood of letters sent to the editors from all over the world.



Thank you for Schneller Magazine. You cannot imagine how comforting it is for every Armenian that you have dedicated an entire issue of the Schneller Magazine to an event that is full of tragic significance for Armenian history. I told my parents and also my friends about the magazine. I could see surprise and appreciation in their eyes and hear it in their words. One article is titled „At least we can listen“. That's right. But for us it is more than that. By publishing the stories, you are telling your readers, whom we Armenians would probably never reach, about the war and the experiences of Armenians. And that is very important for us.

Talar Marashlian, Yerevan (Armenia)

A very moving, touching booklet. I read it from cover to cover. It makes you feel very powerless; does anybody really care what happens to Armenia?

*Rev. ret. Traugott Plieninger,
Bietigheim-Bissingen*

Thank you for all your efforts! The issue is unique in its friendly layout and because it covered thoroughly the Armenian people's history and their sufferings. Your explanation about

»The issue is unique in its friendly layout and because it covered thoroughly the Armenian people's history and their sufferings.«

the Armenia coverage in this issue of the Schneller magazine is logical, convincing and thus very much appreciated. It is very wise to think of others. Such articles help others very much. Hope the message will be heard by the decision makers who can make a change.

Gaby Haddad, Amman (Jordan)

Thank you very much for addressing the tragedy of Armenia in the latest issue of Schneller Magazine. It is truly a tragedy how, even in the 21st century, the geopolitical considerations of the West help to sacrifice the concerns of Armenians and Christian minorities in the Middle East on the altar of power.

Albrecht Hauser, Korntal

I am also grateful for a copy of the Schneller magazine covering Armenia and Artsakh. It is very encouraging to see the attention and focus on an area which

has for centuries been a victim of assaults, genocide, invasion and violence. Such a coverage will certainly help raise awareness among Christians all over and powers who truly care about human values, freedoms and rights.

*Zaven Khanjian, Paramus, New Jersey
(USA)*

I enjoyed the interview with Derya Tamar A. very much. Thank you so much for your excellent work. Believe me, there is a sad story behind every Christian from Anatolia. This is also true in my case. My grandfather lived and worked in New York in 1915. His wife and three children had stayed in Antioch, in what is now Antakya. He sent many letters home but received no reply. That is why he decided to go to Antakya to check on them. When he arrived, he found that his wife and children had died. They were not murdered, they had starved to death.

Ferit Johannes Tekbas, Heilbronn

For years, I have followed your reports on Christians in the Middle East with interest and gratitude. I would like to thank you very much for the Schneller magazine on Armenia. I already read the magazine about Lebanon with great interest and find it really generous that the Schneller Association makes its magazine available for information about these two countries with their enormous problems (and beauties). I live here in Flensburg quite closely with members of two Armenian families and through them I have contact with the Armenian community in Flensburg. In January, we held a funeral service for a fallen Armenian soldier. The mother and sister of the fallen soldier live here in Germany but due to illness, they could not travel to Armenia for the funeral.

Jutta Weiß, Flensburg

I was particularly interested in your new Schneller magazine 1/2021 because I went on a very memorable trip to Armenia in 2017. I find it very valuable that you dedicated an entire issue to this country as only a few people here know more about the Armenian people and their country. The articles are very impressive and informative.

Magdalena Zantow, Plüderhausen

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you most sincerely for your journalistic work on the feature covering Armenia. You made a very good decision to present this country with its history, its people and its enormous worries and hardships and to devote more space to it than usual. I was very touched by your interviews and reports. I recently had a conversation with a related

»You made a very good decision to present this country with its history, its people and its enormous worries and hardships and to devote more space to it than usual.«

friend of mine about the situation there. He is in contact with the dean of the University of Stepanakert. The picture among the rural population as well as among the middle classes and the so-called educated elites is one of despair and a lack of prospects. As I myself live near Rüsselsheim and work in the dean's office, Derya Tamar A.'s statements about the crypto-Armenian existence in our country were particularly thought-provoking for me.

Reverend Hans Jürgen Basteck, Stockstadt



Araz B Photography

View of the hilly landscape of Artsakh in the east of present-day Armenia.

»A big thank you to the editors, also for many excellent contributions in previous Schneller magazines.«

On my trip to Armenia in September 2019 with Martina Waiblinger from the Akademie Bad Boll, I experienced committed, hopeful people in meetings and conversations. Their great desire to work for good peaceful coexistence was very noticeable. So much was destroyed by the war in autumn 2020. I read the Schneller magazine with its focus on Armenia with great interest. The different and very personal contributions of those affected gave me a feeling of participating in the worries and concerns about this country. A big thank you to the editors, also for many excellent contributions in previous Schneller magazines.

Margret Maier, Stuttgart

Thank you so much for the present issue of Schneller Magazine about the latest developments and events in and around Armenia and Artsakh. Thanks also for the choice of the authors scattered in various countries, a genuine image of the Armenian nation, including Jerusalem.

Ani Boujikianian, Beirut (Lebanon)

Every time a new Schneller magazine lands in my letterbox, I look forward to the main feature which is always examined from a variety of perspectives. I was particularly delighted with issue 1/2021 which focused on Armenia. At last, I was able to get more information about the tragic war in autumn 2020. Basically, it is inconceivable that we „Christian Westerners“ of all people know so little about the fate of the ancient Christian Armenian people and that political calls are so weak. Thank you for this excellent and important booklet on „Armenia“!

Margarete Rein, Stuttgart

Jean Etre obituary

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) bids farewell to Jean Etre who was Director of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon from 1986 to 1999.

He took over and led the institution during a very difficult time. During the civil war, different militias or armies repeatedly took control of the southern Bekaa Valley where the JLSS is located. Thanks to his skill, he averted greater damage to the school and ensured that work continued. Hartmut Brenner, the last German director, had had to leave the country in the mid-1980s because of the civil war. As a result, Etre also had to bring about a cultural change at the JLSS.

I experienced Jean Etre as a director respected by all and he was always an obliging host. In the summer of 1999, he departed to manage a Christian institution near Beirut. This was an important step for him and for the JLSS because, during the years of the war, he had to make many compromises to protect the JLSS and, in my opinion, these compromises also committed him in the time

that followed. Nevertheless, I always had respect for Etre's accomplishments and his leadership in managing the JLSS safely in difficult times.

Etre died on 1 May at the age of 69 from a stroke which was probably caused by the delayed effects of a serious accident a few years ago. The EVS mourns the loss of the first Lebanese director of the JLSS.

Reverend Andreas Maurer, member of the Executive Committee of the Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace.

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*God is actually not far from each one of us.
In him we live and move and have our being.*

Acts 17,27



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