



SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



Waste and Recycling in the Middle East

War rubble and the domestic garbage
of Cairo - a valuable resource



KEY TOPIC :

WASTE AND RECYCLING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Dear Reader,

The contents of this issue had already been finalised when another war in the Middle East broke out following the Israeli-American attacks on Iran during the night of 28 February. While I am writing these lines in early March, the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon was also under fire; the Johann Ludwig Schneller School had to be evacuated. Meanwhile, the German authorities have announced that our volunteers will also have to leave Jordan. Once again, we join our friends in Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the entire region in close solidarity, hoping and praying together. Will the killing have come to an end by the time you hold this issue in your hands?

There have been significant personnel changes in the editorial and design teams of our magazine over the past few weeks. We welcome Judith Kubitscheck as our new editor and Simone Struve as our graphic designer (see page 5). This seemed like a good opportunity to refresh the design a little for the first time in five years. Please write to us and let us know what you think.

This issue's main feature is perhaps a little disreputable. Garbage and recycling may not exactly be what seems to be a priority in the Middle East at the moment. But for one thing - we can draw on Judith Kubitscheck's expertise right away. Together with Judith Kühn, she wrote a book in 2015 about Maggie Gobran: a former Egyptian professor of computer science who dedicated her life to the so-called "garbage people" in her city. And, for another, the fight against the littering of this planet is also an issue that concerns people in the most diverse countries of the Middle East and, in a way, unites them across political divides. Whether it is the garbage crisis in Lebanon, the plastic on the seabed of the Gulf of Aqaba, the issue of avoiding waste in both Jewish and Palestinian communities in Jerusalem, or dealing with war rubble in Syria. We have, of course, had to deal with rubble in Germany before – as the contemplation at the beginning of this issue demonstrates.

A brief update on the Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza may help us to keep in mind not only the latest war but also the other political and humanitarian disasters in the Middle East.



Also in this issue: News from the Schneller Schools, a change of bishop in Jerusalem and reviews of some fascinating books...

I hope you enjoy reading this issue and wish you a happy and blessed Easter.

Uwe Gräbe

Ma‘a as-salama, Katja! Ahlan wa-sahlan, Judith!

In the last issue, Katja Buck bid farewell as editor-in-chief of the Schneller magazine. It was a double issue in which she once again pulled out all the stops of her journalistic skill – particularly on the subject that was always closest to her heart: the deep bond with our Christian brothers and sisters in the Middle East. For 23 years she shaped Schneller Magazine; I had the privilege of working alongside her for almost 14 of those years. Editorial meetings were never purely business meetings. We often commiserated together when the situation of our friends in the Middle East had once again worsened. And on many occasions, we rejoiced when we were able to report on positive developments at the Schneller schools. We spent hours debating topics and content together. It was just as helpful as it was stimulating that we sometimes approached these topics from quite different perspectives. This is how Schneller Magazine became what it is today: a publication that is as insightful as it is influential within our range of topics.

Now, Katja Buck wishes to devote more of her time in future to other projects within her field of expertise.

As Executive Secretary, I would like to thank her wholeheartedly on behalf of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools for all her dedication and wish her God’s blessing for the road ahead: Ma‘a as-salama – we are sure to meet again here and there.

Since this magazine was founded in 1884, it has changed its name several times: “Der Bote aus Zion” (The Zion Messenger), “Im Lande Jesu” (In the Land of Jesus), “Der Schneller Bote” (The Schneller Messenger) and lastly the “Schneller Magazine”. Each editorial team has given the magazine its own distinctive character. With this in mind, I am delighted to welcome Judith Kubitschek as our new editor with a warm “Ahlan wa-sahlan”. This is the first issue of Schneller Magazine for which Judith is responsible, but it is certainly not the first time she has been involved with people in the Middle East. In addition to a sound academic background, she brings a wealth of experience from projects in Beit Jala in Palestine, the Yemeni capital Sana‘a, Egypt, and a refugee camp on the Tunisian-Libyan border.

As an editor for the Evangelical Press Service (epd) – a role she will continue to carry out – she has also conducted quite a few interviews here at

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KATJA BUCK, UWE GRÄBE





our offices. Together with Leonhard Ayasse, Programme Assistant Middle East/Schneller, I very much look forward to working with her and also wish her God's abundant blessings!

Martin Keiper, who has been responsible for the graphic design of Schneller magazine since 2020, has also stepped down from this role for reasons of

age. His position was recently taken over by the design studio of Simone Struve. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their excellent collaboration so far – and I look forward to the future!

Dear Readers of the Schneller Magazine,

I am delighted to have been appointed as the new editor-in-chief of the Schneller Magazine with the responsibility of designing its content starting with this issue.

I have been reading the publication with great interest for many years, as it not only provides information about the valuable work of the Schneller Schools but also offers exclusive insights into the Middle East and the situation of the Christians living there. It is thanks to my predecessor, Katja Buck, and Uwe Gräbe that the magazine has become what it is today.

I graduated with a degree in Islamic Studies, Political Science (specialising in the Middle East) and Protestant Theology, and have been closely engaged with this region for many years. In addition to my role as an editor at the Evangelical Press Service in the Stuttgart office, I consider it a great privilege that I now

have the opportunity to focus more closely once again on people and issues regarding the Middle East. The rich heritage of the Oriental Christians and their self-confident approach to their faith, despite numerous challenges, have never ceased to impress on my travels. This issue offers a small glimpse of this in my article about the Zabbaleen in Cairo.

Best regards, Judith Kubitscheck



Do you have any questions, suggestions for topics or feedback? If so, I look forward to hearing from you. You can contact me at: Kubitscheck@ems-online.org

„Monte Scherbelino“ - Stuttgart's rubble hill as a sacred place

The Birkenkopf is Stuttgart's highest hill. In fine weather, it is a popular destination for day trips, offering a splendid view far into the countryside and a lovely panorama over the city. The people of Stuttgart also call the Birkenkopf 'Monte Scherbelino' – which means 'rubble hill'.

Towering at just over 300 metres above the city centre, it isn't actually a real mountain – it's more a pile of rubble. Like the hills on the outskirts of many German cities, so too were the ruins of buildings destroyed during the war dumped up there in Stuttgart between 1953 and 1957 – a heap measuring 40 metres high containing 1.5 million cubic metres of rubble. It was not until 12 years after the end of the war that dumping operations were finally completed. It is indeed a heap of ruins representing history.

Back in the spring of 1953, Reverend Hilmar Schieber from the neighbouring Paul Gerhardt congregation took a group of children and young people on a hike up the Birkenkopf to erect a wooden cross there. Perhaps he wanted to show the children that this heap of rubble in the neighbourhood was the best example of the place of skulls, Golgotha, where Jesus was crucified.

And he was not the only one. At Easter, the first public service for the congregation was held up there, and from 1954 onwards, monthly morning services were held on the Birkenkopf during the

summer months. In 2003, the wooden cross was replaced by a steel-beam cross visible from afar, and it now looks almost like a cross placed on mountain peaks in the Alps.

The slopes are now overgrown with bushes and trees. For many years, devotions have been held there every week at 8 am from Easter through to the end of October, usually accompanied by brass band music.

When you reach the top, you see the bronze plaque by the path commemorating the history of the Monte Scherbelino: 'in memory of the victims and as a warning to the living'.

Yet on a beautiful summer's day, all this seems very far away to the generations who have long since lost any personal connection to this terrible chapter in German history. The wounds of dictatorship and war, and the struggles of reconciliation and reconstruction, seem to have healed beneath the fresh green of the vegetation. This can also be comforting and strengthen the hope that destruction and hatred will not remain humanity's defining factors forever.





MONTE SCHERBELINO

Picture credit: Uwe Gräbe

And yet the question remains, what message should this place convey today and in the future? Two devotions that I attended years ago have remained etched in my memory.

On Holy Saturday last year, I attended a peace service organised by volunteers without an ordained minister. The service focused on the latest news about wars and crises around the world and included a prayer of intercession for all those working for peace and reconciliation. In particular, this includes the Middle East and the Schneller schools, with which the congregation of Botnang has a special connection. On that peaceful Holy Saturday, a walk in the fresh air and the service did me good and strengthened my hope.

My second memory is linked to a devotion held during the pandemic. At a time when online meetings dominated daily life via the tiles on our screens, the open-air service on the Birkenkopf offered the experience of direct communion. At the end of the service, the

congregation formed a circle of blessing: everyone spread out their arms and positioned themselves next to their neighbour in such a way as to maintain social distancing while at the same time their arms created a link without any direct contact. This picture has become a symbol for me of the power of blessing. Wherever people face each other, even at a distance, God's presence is at work; Christ is right there in the midst of it all.

As we enter these holy weeks of passion and hope for the Resurrection, I wish this power of blessing upon you all.



Stephan Mühlich

is the senior pastor of the Protestant parish in Stuttgart-Botnang and also regularly leads devotions at "Monte Scherbelino"

The garbage collectors of Cairo

The “Zabbaleen” collect, sort and reprocess garbage. One of them is 36-year-old Sara. She wants her daughters to have an education and a better life.

Pick-up trucks, loaded to the brim with large garbage sacks, jostle their way through the narrow alleys of Mokattam. Women sit by the roadside or on the open ground floors of the houses, sorting the garbage with their bare hands.

The settlement of Manshiyyet Nasser, which everyone simply calls ‘Mokattam’ because it lies at the foot of the plateau of the same name in south-east Cairo, is regarded as the ‘original garbage city’. It is the oldest, largest and most developed of Cairo’s garbage settlements. This is where the people live who collect the city’s waste on their donkey carts and pick-ups to sort it in their homes and resell it.

Christian crosses can be seen on many front doors, images of saints hang above the streets, and in the centre stands a huge church carved into the rock.

The garbage city has about 70,000 inhabitants, known as ‘Zabbaleen’, which means ‘garbage people’ in Arabic. Most of them are Coptic Orthodox Christians who originally came to the Egyptian capital from the rural regions of Upper Egypt as impoverished small farmholders.

Cairo’s garbage collectors are known for recycling a record 80 to 85 per cent of garbage. An ingenious system has developed where everyone has their place in the waste recycling process. Sara, 36 years old, is an expert in plastic. She receives the unsorted plastic pressed into bales as tall as a person. In the basement of her house, she sorts it by colour and material. Two rats scurry squeaking towards the exit; a dog has made itself comfortable on a garbage bag.

Sara sells the sorted plastic to others who, as she explains, wash it, shred it, wash it again and then resell it. It wasn’t easy for the mother of three to learn what to look out for when sorting plastic. But she chose plastic because



Picture credit: Valentin Suckut

she didn't want her daughters to touch unsorted general waste from hospitals and hotels for hygiene reasons. As she explains, "Plastic waste is much cleaner."

A few steps further up is the family's living area. This is strictly separated from the garbage, and anyone who walks through the front door enters a clean, tidy living room. Sara serves her guests schnitzel, chips, rice and salad. All three daughters attend school; the two older girls help their mother with sorting in their spare time.

Sara's children receive financial support from the Egyptian organisation 'Chance for a Better Life', which works closely with the association 'Müllstadtkinder Kairo', (Cairo's Garbage City Children) based in Biessenhofen in the Ostallgäu region of Bavaria. This means that, in addition to state school lessons – which take place in huge classes with a teacher using the traditional chalk-and-talk method – they are also eligible to receive private tuition.

"We want the children to have a chance at a better life through a good education and to be able to choose what

they want to do later on," says Nancy Ibrahim, who arranges sponsorships to Germany through the organization "Müllstadtkinder Kairo".

For the youngest girl, 13-year-old Jessica, who has been battling a tumour in her head, it is already clear what she wants to be when she grows up: a paediatrician. "So I can help other children who go through something similar to what I've been through."

To the south of Cairo lies the Church of the "Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Athanasius". It is surrounded by a levelled area and several piles of rubble. Six years ago, garbage collectors still lived here in huts and simple stone houses in an informal settlement – until, in March 2020, when heavy rainfall triggered a major flood that swept everything away— houses, animals and people. Many managed to escape to the church, which was situated slightly higher up, but others lost their lives in the floodwaters.

"The flood was terrible, but the situation afterwards was even worse," says Nancy Ibrahim. "Many had no money to rent a flat, so they just slept on the



SARA SORTS THE PLASTIC GARBAGE
IN THE BASEMENT OF HER HOUSE

streets for months among the garbage. Even today, some children start to panic when it starts to rain or when they hear the sound of rain.”

For the past two and a half years, many of the approximately 2,000 flood victims have been living in six-storey apartment blocks built for them by the Egyptian government. Damiana and her family have also found somewhere to live there. Although inflation has fallen significantly compared to last year, it has already left its mark on the family: Issam, the father, had to pay fees to the property owners in the area where he has the right to collect the ‘good waste’ from hotels and residential complexes. He could no longer afford these due to inflation.

He handed over his rights to a colleague and sold his car. With the money, he bought pigs which are reared on the organic waste he buys from other Zabbaleen. But that is not enough to live on.

So he collects rubbish for a garbage dealer in a specific area, earning a little extra money in the process.

Back in Mokattam: hidden in the winding alleys lies one of the many ‘community centres’ run by the ‘Stephen’s Children’ organisation. Here, mothers meet for training sessions on topics such as parenting, nutrition and violence prevention. Children attend the nursery there, and there is a small medical centre offering basic healthcare.

“Stephen’s Children” was founded in 1989 by Maggie Gobran, the “Mother Teresa of Cairo”, who has been nominated several times for the Nobel Peace Prize for her work among the children of the waste pickers. The daughter of an Egyptian doctor who was a professor of computer science at the American University in Cairo, she gave up her career to devote herself entirely to the children in the Mokattam garbage city.

“We want to show the children that they are precious just as they are. And if they want to achieve something, they can do it with Jesus by their side,” explains Maggie Gobran, who is affectionately called “Mama Maggie” by “her” children.

That’s why all the children whether in one of the kindergartens, in the organisation’s schools, or at camps are taught a Bible verse that they recite aloud together every day. “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13) She also encourages the young people to think about what their life’s purpose is: “Just as everyone has different fingerprints and every iris is unique, so too does every person have



DAMIANA AND ISSAM
IN THEIR APARTMENT

Picture credit: Judith Kubitscheck



Picture credit: Christoph Jorda

their own purpose in life. When you have found it, you will inspire others.”

Every morning, Maggie Gobran gets up early to have time for prayer and read the Bible. She often spends several days seeking solitude in one of the Coptic monasteries in the desert. “You have no control over the length of your life, but you do over its depth.” She’s convinced of this. That is why it’s so important to set the right priorities.

A girls’ club is currently taking place at the centre in Mokattam. Jaqueline, a co-worker, is a self-confident woman with dyed red hair. She teaches the girls that they can achieve things and are allowed to have dreams.

Jaqueline experienced this herself. As the ninth child born into the family, she rarely had a say in anything and was regularly beaten by her older brothers, as she recounts.

” *You have no control over the LENGTH of your life but you do over its DEPTH.* ”

Mama Maggie

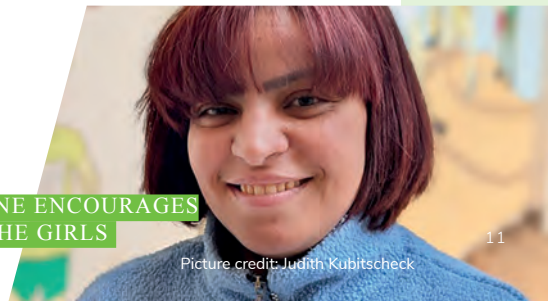
“I could hardly believe it when I was asked if I wanted to work with Stephen’s Children. I found out I could realise my

dreams. “And now my older siblings treat me with respect and come to me, their younger sister, when they have problems and need help,” she says with a laugh.

Judith Kubitscheck

(From the author’s epd material)

JAQUELINE ENCOURAGES THE GIRLS



Picture credit: Judith Kubitscheck

Diving to clean up coral reefs

Jordanian initiative tackles marine trash in the Red Sea

ProjectSea did not begin as an organization. It began underwater. In 2021, in the midst of COVID-19, although the world seemed to be empty, dives in the Gulf of Aqaba revealed what the surface had hidden: a seabed layered with waste. Plastic tangled in coral. Fishing lines wrapped around rocks or, worse still, sea animals. Debris and trash settled where reefs should have been the focus. That is where two divers, Beisan Alsharif and Seif Al Madanat, started collecting what they could carry. It was just instinct. And that instinct became ProjectSea.

More than 17 tonnes of waste have been removed from the seabed

Today, the core of the ProjectSea's work remains underwater. Certified divers lead structured seabed cleanup campaigns across the Red Sea, operating under strict safety and environmental protocols. Instructors, recreational divers, students, and community members descend as participants in restoration.

Each dive is planned carefully to ensure that the act of cleaning does not further disturb fragile ecosystems. What begins as physical labor often becomes more. It becomes a sharpened awareness of what is at stake.

Since 2021, dozens of campaigns in the Gulf of Aqaba have brought together more than 680 volunteers representing over 55 nationalities. Nearly half are women, a decision that is intentional and foundational to ProjectSea. Here, environmental leadership is shared and active.

More than 17 tonnes of waste, with over 325,000 individual pieces, have been removed from the seabed and surrounding areas. Most of it is plastic. Material designed for convenience, built for permanence. It fractures into microplastics, enters the food chain, and remains long after its original purpose is forgotten.



BEISAN ALSHARIF AND SEIF AL MADANAT FOUNDED THE INITIATIVE

Picture credit: @thisisprojectsea

From the outset, the aim was never only removal. Cleaning the sea without changing human behavior would mean returning to the same problem. It was a simple premise: conservation must be collective, and protection must include education. At least, that is not how ProjectSea saw it. It is shared ground. Ground that binds communities, economies, and generations.



Aqaba's winter waters allow for sustained engagement, preventing the work from becoming seasonal or symbolic. Continuity has built a durable network of volunteers who remain involved beyond a single event.

What is discarded on land does not disappear. It migrates.

The items recovered tell their own story: bottles, bags, nets, metal fragments, tires, heavy debris. Evidence that what is discarded on land does not disappear. It migrates. The connection between daily habits and marine degradation is direct, visible, and undeniable. What is more, however, is that it is harmful.

Material retrieved from the seabed is too degraded to recycle. During beach cleanups, plastic is sorted and sent to local recycling partners. The organization is also introducing large fish-shaped installations on beaches, acting as functional sculptures that serve as collection points for plastic waste. The hope is that the plastic gathered through these installations will be repurposed into public beach furniture in collaboration with local businesses. This way, waste returns as utility and local enterprise becomes part of environmental recovery.

Part of the push to rehabilitate the Red Sea in Jordan is responding to global pressures. The Gulf of Aqaba holds rare, resilient coral systems, yet faces mounting strain from pollution, tourism, and consumption patterns that

outpace regulation. Protecting it is both an ecological necessity and an economic imperative. Marine health underpins livelihoods, tourism, and regional stability. This is why community participation remains central. Residents, schools, universities, companies, and institutions contribute time and effort. The model is voluntary and inclusive. Responsibility is shared.

Through workshops, storytelling, public campaigns, and digital outreach, the goal is to make the consequences of everyday consumption visible. Small behavioral shifts, accumulate. Project-Sea's vision extends beyond cleanup statistics. It is about shaping a culture that recognizes stewardship as an obligation, not an option. The sea is not inherited; it is borrowed. What remains will reflect the choices made now.



Seif Al Madanat



instagram

@thisisprojectsea



DIVERS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE CLEANING UP THE SEA

Picture credit: @thisisprojectsea

UN begins clearing rubbish dump in Gaza City

In February 2026, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) began work in Gaza to clear the huge piles of rubbish that have accumulated, especially near the Firas Market in Gaza City.

Alessandro Mrakic, head of the UNDP office in Gaza, told Reuters' news agency that he estimated the rubbish heap to be 300,000 cubic metres in volume and 13 metres high.

The vast amount of rubbish has caused major environmental and health problems, such as disease and swarms of insects. Clean-up work was therefore urgently needed. The heap of waste had accumulated after municipal workers were prevented from reaching Gaza's

main landfill site in the Juhr al-Dik area – adjacent to the border with Israel – at the start of the Gaza War in October 2023.

The area in Juhr al-Dik is now under full Israeli control. Over the next six months, the UNDP plans to transport the waste to a new temporary landfill site in the Abu Jarad area, south of Gaza City, which meets environmental standards.

The project is funded by the Humanitarian Fund and the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations.

(Source: Reuters)

Find the waste heap on
Google Earth:





Rescuing food instead of wasting it

An organization aims to reduce waste in Jerusalem

We have to remember that when we throw something “away”, there is in fact no such thing as “away”. We are simply having it moved somewhere else, which may be out of sight, but should never be out of mind...

There are many technological advances in solid waste treatment, and we have to hope that more sophisticated treatment will be undertaken in Israel sooner, rather than later.

There are four points in the fresh food chain where serious waste occurs.

1 Agricultural produce that doesn't reach the markets

3 Produce that is left over in supermarkets and is simply thrown away

2 Produce that reaches the wholesalers, but is not distributed to the greengrocers and supermarkets

4 Home waste: Food left over after meals, food thrown out from the fridge

In our capacity as a non-profit organization, the Jerusalem Green Fund doesn't fix public policy, but rather has the responsibility to encourage the general public, as well as the business sector to throw away as little as possible. We have found that close to half of our municipal solid waste (MSW) is organic, and therefore we decided to focus on the food cycle.

In my city, Jerusalem, we are attempting to improve this very negative balance. After discovering that 12 tons produce were being thrown away every day at the wholesale sorting center, a wonderful organization known as the “Food Rescuers” undertook to prevent the dumping of several tons of fresh produce every day, and to have boxes of fruit and vegetables prepared for hund-

reds of needy Jewish, Christian and Muslim families throughout Jerusalem.

This has brought about the recruitment of an army of volunteers, who sort through the produce, pack the boxes, and help with distribution in all sectors of the city, but clearly focus on poorer neighborhoods. In two of the neighborhoods where the Jerusalem Green Fund has staff, we have set up a weekly food rescue stand, which receives its produce directly from local neighborhood supermarkets. The people served by these projects not only receive a weekly box of produce, but also have a weekly meeting with fellow residents over a cup of tea or coffee. This is, of course a side benefit.

Another serious cause of waste is the expiry date challenge. Most people simply don't realize that food does not necessarily go bad after the expiry date, and that in fact it can go bad before. The date protects the supermarket, rather

than its customers. This applies especially to dry produce such as sugar, kidney beans, lentils, peas etc., and of course canned food. In the case of dairy products, the expiry date is more significant, but not the final word. Again, our job is to explain this to our local consumers.

Not all food can be rescued, so it is important to find a responsible way to dispose of food waste. In the spirit of the circular economy to which we all strive, the best solution is composting. We simply give our food waste back to the soil in which it was grown. In Jerusalem there are some 90 community gardens, run by residents in all parts of the city. Each community garden has a composting center, available for all residents in the surrounding area. Our job is to educate the public to separate their organic waste from the rest, and take it to the nearest community compost site. In the case of condominiums, we encourage residents to have a com-





post bin in their jointly owned garden, to provide fertilizer for their use.

One major focus of our work in addressing the never-ending challenge of domestic waste, is to encourage and train residents to grow some of their food. A lemon tree in the garden, a window box with mint, parsley, coriander or thyme, can all help prevent food waste, because when herbs grow fresh in our garden, we take only as much as we need... We also aim to have food-growing programs in schools. There is a very important public health aspect to this.

Modern day kids often think of vegetables as something repulsive that comes home from the supermarket.

However, from my experience of working with kids and adults alike, there is no greater pleasure than eating vegetables that we grow ourselves.

To sum up – as a grassroots organization with ties to all of Jerusalem’s communities, we are attempting to reduce the amount of solid waste dumped from Jerusalem every day (more than 1,000 tons). We do this by educating the public to avoid food waste, to compost locally what would otherwise be “thrown away” and to grow as many fresh herbs and vegetables as possible in private and community gardens. There is a long road ahead, but we have made a start!



Naomi Tsur

Founder of the Jerusalem Green Fund. After 12 years as Director of the Society for the Protection of Nature, she served for five years as Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem (2008-2013). During this time, she played a key role in helping the local Protestant community to salvage the historic altar from the chapel of the first Schneller School, the “Syrian Orphanage” in Jerusalem, and move it to the Church of the Ascension of the Auguste Victoria Foundation on the Mount of Olives.



For more information,
go to:
www.jgf.org.il



War rubble is raw material, not waste

How a Syrian aims to reconstruct his country by recycling

Schneller-Magazin (SM): Mr Al-Swaidani, you are Senior Researcher at the Institute for Applied Building Research (IAB) in Weimar and a university professor at the “Innovationszentrum Bau Weimar” (Weimar Construction Innovation Centre). Before you came to Germany, you were the only professor in the whole of Syria conducting research into the recycling of war rubble at Damascus University...

” Aref Al-Swaidani: ... yes, but unfortunately Bashar al-Assad’s government did not allow us as scientists to enter the reined areas to help with reconstruction there.

The Assad regime was criminal; they arrested, killed, destroyed homes and displaced millions of Syrians. They also killed my nephew and burned his body without any mercy.

Because we were from Dara’a, the birthplace of the revolution against Assad, we lived in constant fear of being arrested. Luckily I managed to leave Syria in 2022. ”

SM: Now you live in Germany and still have a dream that is gradually becoming a reality: the reconstruction of Syria...

” Al-Swaidani: Exactly! There are vast quantities of war rubble in Syria. The rubble is a symbol of destruction, violence and loss. But also, it is precisely the right building material we need for reconstruction. As experts, we do not refer to rubble as waste, but as an ‘urban raw materials depot’. ”

SM: And how can such a “depot of raw materials” be converted into reusable building materials?

” Al-Swaidani: First, we need to use digital surveying to obtain a precise map of the damaged areas. Jobar in the north-east of Damascus would be an ideal place to start such a project. It is a severely damaged area and there are huge amounts of rubble there. There, we could work with the local population to construct simple buildings or housing. But before we get started, unexploded ordnance must be cleared so that no one is put at risk, and property rights must be clarified as far as possible.

My aim would be to set up a mobile crushing and sorting plant right there in the devastated area, one that is simple to operate and requires little maintenance. After crushing, sorting and removing metals such as steel using magnets, the rubble is ground again

using crushers and then sorted by modern sorting machines into various building materials such as concrete, bricks, plaster, plastic, wood, etc. Hazardous materials such as asbestos – which was fortunately only used in small quantities in Syria – must also be removed. The building materials are then processed until they can be reused in various sectors, such as concrete or cement production. ”

SM: What are the advantages of recycling on site?

” **Al-Swaidani:** It is carbon dioxide-neutral and cost-effective. From an ecological point of view, cement production generates enormous amounts of carbon dioxide emissions. It alone accounts for around seven or eight per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions. Recycling significantly reduces the demand for cement. It is also cost-effective. Importing building materials is very expensive and also makes Syrians dependent on international supply chains. ”

SM: When might the first such recycling project actually begin on site?

” **Al-Swaidani:** As soon as possible! We have already set up some good networks. For example, we have close ties with Damascus University. We still need funding for the two planned pilot projects in Jobar and Baba Amro. We are therefore working closely with the

German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Develop-

ment (BMZ) and the relevant funding bodies in Germany.

And I coordinate every step with my German friends. There are a lot of experts here in Weimar. In my opinion, I would even describe Weimar as Germany’s ‘construction capital’. I am certain that Germany could play a key role in the reconstruction of Syria. At the Technikum, a 650-square-metre workshop at the IAB in Weimar, we are conducting research into the recycling of building materials – knowledge that we can then also apply on site in Syria.

Reconstruction in Syria does not start from nothing or from scratch. It starts with what already exists: the stones that have fallen but have not disappeared. The knowledge that has been interrupted but not wiped out. The people who have stayed or who are returning. The question is not whether recycling is possible, but whether we have the will to do it. ”



Prof. Aref Al-Swaidani

The concrete cube was made from recycled materials at IAB Weimar. The interview was conducted by Judith Kubitscheck

Image credit: Thimo Hennig, IAB Weimar gGmbH

Perspective of a Lebanese garbage man

Ziad Abi Chaker transforms domestic waste into new products

I often call myself a “master garbage man” because I fell in love with the potential of waste when I was just nineteen. My journey began at Rutgers University, where an elective in environmental engineering revealed my true calling: finding the value in what others discard.

Returning to Lebanon after the civil war, I was determined to play a role in making my country a better place. Today, through Cedar Environmental, we are proving that Lebanon’s chronic waste crisis is not an inevitable disaster, but a massive mismanagement of valuable resources.

Incinerators are a
“ticking time bomb”

For decades, Lebanon has been trapped in a “linear economy” where waste is viewed as a problem to be buried or burned. The 2015 garbage crisis which

left our streets overflowing and filled out air with the smell of decay, was a direct result of this failed, centralized model. This failure is fuelled by institutionalized corruption and monopolies that profit from landfills and push for expensive, unsuitable solutions like incinerators. Incinerators are a “ticking time bomb”. They are costly, require dangerous toxic ash disposal, and are fundamentally ill-suited for Lebanon’s waste, which is 65% organic material with high water content.

Waste as a
resource

At Cedar Environmental, our philosophy is simple: Waste is a resource. We don’t believe in landfills; we believe in a circular economy where nothing is wasted. We have spent years developing localized, decentralized technologies that turn household waste into raw materials for new products.

TRADITIONAL GLASSBLOWERS
CONVERT WASTE GLASS INTO WORKS OF ART

Picture credit: facebook Seite Ziad Abi Chaker



Dynamic composting: We developed a technology that uses enzymes to accelerate the composting process from 90 days to just three, producing high-grade, odorless fertilizer from food waste.

Eco-boards: To tackle the international nightmare of plastic bags, we invented a process to shred and compress all types of non-recyclable plastics into high-durability panels. These Eco-boards have a lifespan of 500 years and are used to build street recycling bins, vertical green walls, and even portable toilets.

GGRIL: In 2013, we launched the Green Glass Recycling Initiative—Lebanon to address the 71 million bottles dumped annually since our national glass plant was destroyed in 2006. We partner with the country's last six traditional glassblowers to transform crushed glass into modern housewares, preserving a Phoenician heritage while cleaning our environment.

Navigating a corrupt landscape

Building a sustainable future in Lebanon requires more than just engineering; it requires persistence and a refusal to engage in the “kickback culture” that plagues public contracts. I have made a firm decision never to engage in corruption, even if it limits our growth. We also refuse outside investors to ensure our environmental mission is never sacrificed for the sake of profit-only decisions.



FOR ZIAD ABI CHAKER, PLASTIC BOTTLES ARE NOT RUBBISH, BUT A RESOURCE

Picture credit: www.al-rawiya.com/iwayetna-ziad-abichaker/

To navigate these challenges, we pivoted our business model. Instead of just setting plants, we now build, own, and entirely manage micro-municipal recycling facilities. Our project in Beit Mery, 16 kilometers east of Beirut, is a prime example of success. We process 20 tons of waste daily with a “zero-waste-to-landfill” setup, creating green jobs and proving that decentralized management is feasible and affordable for local communities.

The path forward

My ambition is to reach a point where we treat 500 tons of waste daily as raw material. We are expanding into urban agriculture with rooftop gardens that use air-conditioning runoff for irrigation and bring food production back into the concrete jungle of Beirut. If you think the economy is more important than the environment, try counting your money while holding your breath.

We will keep fighting, keep innovating, and keep proving that a zero-waste Lebanon is not science fiction – it is a reality we have already built. Facing troubles is part of the journey; we don't shy away, we fight.



Credits: Johan Neissa

Ziad Abi Chaker

X: @Ziad_AC
 www.cedarenv.com
 www.ggril.org

The waste situation in Lebanon

Since the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1991, there was no formal governmental plan to deal with domestic waste. The unspoken policy was to bring in political crony companies to haul the waste off the streets to a landfill with practically no sorting or recycling. There was also a blatant policy of circumventing local municipalities by withholding funds from the coffers disabling them from doing any local waste management.

As the model faltered due to landfills overflowing and residents complaining the crisis got out of hand and garbage is now omnipresent everywhere one looks. By the end of 2025, the government, running out of funds, passed a law giving municipalities the legal right to collect a direct tax from citizens to finance local waste management plans.

Ziad Abi Chaker



YouTube
 „A garbage love story“

PLASTIC IS TURNED INTO GREEN WALLS

Change of bishop in Jerusalem

At the start of the year, clergy from all over the world travelled to Jerusalem to mark the farewell of Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar and the consecration of his successor, Imad Mousa Haddad. Both bishops of the Lutheran Church have close ties to the Schneller Schools.

And all of a sudden, the ‘church etiquette’ that is usually so important in Jerusalem is completely set aside: no robes, no procession for the grand entrance, no set seating arrangement at the farewell service for Sani Ibrahim Azar (or ‘Barhum’, as he is always affectionately known), Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). They sit there in a colourful row in the chapel of the Talitha Kumi School Centre in the Palestinian town of Beit Jala, like a scene from a large family: female bishops from Scandinavia, peace activists from America, pastors from Germany and lay companions of the outgoing head of the church. The pastor of the German congregation in Jerusalem plays the piano, and in the midst of it all, a delegation from the Palestinian security forces makes a particularly imposing and brisk entrance – only to take their leave again shortly afterwards. Archbishop Hosam Naoum of the Anglican EMS member church in Jerusalem is also attending.

Bishop Azar:
a soft-spoken gentleman

Colourful, ecumenical, joyous. The gratitude felt for the services of “Sayyidna Barhum”, is palpable. With great for-

bearance, he steered his small church through the most difficult of times. He was born at the Schneller School in Lebanon and was probably more influenced by Germany than any other Palestinian bishop. While others in the country were spreading murder and destruction, this man built up his community. The educational institutions of his small church were always close to his heart. And when he ordained his daughter Sally as the first female pastor and launched a gender-justice ministry in his church — those were surely moments of glory for this modest man, a man of quiet words, for whom grand gestures were entirely foreign.



BISHOP AZAR HANDS OVER HIS OFFICE TO HIS SUCCESSOR

Picture credit: ELCJHL



SCOUTS FROM BETHLEHEM CREATE A FESTIVE ATMOSPHERE

Picture credit: ELC.HL

With scouts and drums through the bazaar street

The scene is quite different two days later at the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem for the consecration of his successor, Imad Mousa Haddad: For the grand procession from Jaffa Gate, scouts from Bethlehem and Beit Jala have come with kettledrums, trumpets and bagpipes; a throng of people make their way down the bazaar streets towards the church.

Shopkeepers hurriedly clear their displays out of the way, while the local pastors at least attempt to organise an orderly liturgical procession into the church. But how is that meant to work – when there are several dozen bishops in their colourful mitres and chasubles (provided they're from the US or Scandinavia), as well as many more clerics from the Jerusalem ecumenical community and from all over the world, who are above all delighted by the encounters and can't seem to stop their animated conversation? Eventually, somehow, everyone manages to find a place in the church;

the organ blasts out, the powerful voice of the Anglican Archdeacon Fuad Dagher booms with a small choir, and, yes, on this day the small flock is, for once, clearly visible in this city, where Palestinian Christians all too often feel marginalised.

Once again, many have been held up at the checkpoints between Jerusalem and the West Bank, some for hours; the Scouts have been delayed, others were not allowed through at all. This makes it all the more important to demonstrate: here we are. We have been part of this city since the days of the early Church; we stand firm in our presence. The signal is unmistakable; there is a tremendous energy in the air today.

New Bishop Haddad calls for repentance

Bishop Imad Haddad also has his own ties to the EMS-Community. He also studied at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut, among other places. He also sits on the administrative boards of the NEST and the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Jordan.



On this Sunday after Epiphany, he preaches about John the Baptist: Like the 'voice of one crying in the wilderness', he too sees himself amidst all the often brutal upheavals in the Holy Land. The bishop's duty, he says, is to call for repentance here. All this is put very diplomatically; Imad Haddad seems deliberately to avoid provocative "trigger words". And yet the question remains, who exactly is supposed to repent here? It is no secret that Palestinian Christians are often dissatisfied with what church leaders from the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) say about the Middle East. It is also striking that on this day, it is particularly those among the ELCJHL clergy who often express themselves very pointedly on such issues, seeking to find an affinity with the new bishop.



THE NEW BISHOP
IMAD HADDAD

Picture credit: ELCJHL

Things look as if they will remain exciting in the international ecumenical community. May God grant the new bishop abundant wisdom!

Uwe Gräbe

The new head of the Lutherans in Jerusalem

Imad Mousa Haddad is the fifth bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), which currently has around 2,000 members across six congregations in Jordan, Jerusalem and the West Bank. He was elected in June 2025 as the successor to Sani Ibrahim Azar, who has now retired.

The new bishop comes from the Palestinian town of Beit Jala and studied theology in Beirut and Columbia, South Carolina. He previously served as a pastor in Beit Sahour and Ramallah before moving to Amman in 2020.

The ELCJHL was founded in 1959 and became independent of the German provost in 1979 with the appointment of its own bishop. It is a member of the Lutheran World Federation. The church's roots date back to the 19th century.

Schneller School trains girls to become carpenters

At the Johann-Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon, Tia (14) and Zeina (13) are the first two girls to start the carpentry training programme. They are benefiting from an initiative launched by the Director, Odette Makhoul, who is offering free carpentry training to all girls. Her aim is to encourage women to venture into traditionally male-dominated professions.

Tia comes from Hammara, a village in the western Bekaa Valley. She is attending the school together with her younger brother. As both her parents work, Tia had to take on household responsibilities at an early age, such as looking after her younger brother.

Zeina is from Baalbek. She lives at home with her mother and her brother, who is training to become a car mechanic at the school. Zeina's mother has to

look after both children on her own, as Zeina's father has passed away. The Director reports that Zeina was deeply upset by her father's death and that it also affected her self-confidence. However, she soon discovered her passion and talent for handicrafts at school and has really blossomed.

Odette Makhoul also emphasises that the girls receive a great deal of support from their families, even though the situation is new and unfamiliar to them. This is partly due to the school's excellent reputation. It is well known that an education at the Schneller schools significantly improves the career prospects of its students.

In any case, the girls are highly motivated to complete their training alongside their 110 male classmates.

We certainly wish Tia and Zeina continued success and much enjoyment in their training!



THE TWO GIRLS ARE
HIGHLY MOTIVATED



Leonhard H. Ayasse

Programme Assistant
Middle East





Coptic Church: First Metropolitan appointed for Germany

Picture credit: private

In November 2025, the Coptic Pope Tawadros II elevated Anba Damian, General Bishop of the Diocese of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Northern Germany, to the rank of Metropolitan of the Coptic Church in Germany at St Mark's Cathedral in Abbassia (Cairo). This marks the first time the Coptic Church has appointed a Metropolitan

for ministry in Germany. A Metropolitan is the head of a group of bishops, comparable to an archbishop, and also acts as an advisor to the Coptic Pope. Anba Damian has been a bishop for 30 years. The 70-year-old Metropolitan's seat of office is the Coptic Orthodox monastery in Hörter in North Rhine-Westphalia.



Botrus Mansour, new Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance

Picture credit: WEA

The first time an Arab Christian leader heads the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA): At the end of October 2025, advocate Botrus Mansour from Nazareth has been appointed as the new Secretary General of the WEA.

The fact that "a Palestinian Christian from Israel" has been asked to assume this office holds a special significance "especially now, when, after more than two years of war, a ceasefire is in place in our region, which I hope will endure", Mansour said at the time in his inaugural address, according to a statement from the WEA.

Since 2004, Mansour has served as operational director of Nazareth Baptist School. He co-founded the Local Baptist Church in Nazareth in 1996 and was ordained as an elder in 2001.

His leadership roles include chairing the Convention of Evangelical Churches in Israel, serving as chair of the Alliance of Evangelical Conventions in Jordan and the Holy Land. He has also been a member of the Global Council of Advocates International, an international network of Christian lawyers dedicated to promoting human rights and justice, and co-chair of the Lausanne Initiative for Reconciliation in Israel-Palestine.

As General Secretary of the WEA, Mansour succeeds Thomas Schirrmacher, who stepped down from his post at the beginning of April 2024 for health reasons. According to its own figures, the WEA represents more than 600 million evangelical Christians in over 148 countries.

Medical care in the rubble-strewn wasteland of Gaza

Thank you to everyone who has helped!

No, nothing is all right in Gaza. Not even after last October's ceasefire. People are still being killed every day in this rubble-strewn wasteland; the fates of those who live here seem to hold no interest for many of those who are deciding the region's future. The healthcare system is virtually destroyed. Infections, chronic diarrhoea and skin diseases are widespread due to the appalling sanitary conditions.

Throughout the war and to this day, the international EMS Community has supported the Ahli Arab Hospital, run by our Anglican EMS member church in Gaza. Although this hospital too has suffered considerable war damage, the medical team has not stopped providing care to people – including in a large tent that was erected to replace a destroyed wing of the hospital.

Infections, chronic illnesses, children suffering from malnutrition, cancer or severe burns: this is where doctors and nurses continue their work in the A&E department, operating theatres and outpatient care, where other hospitals have long since had to cease operations.

Just recently, EMS was able to allocate almost €100,000 to this work. The "lion's share" of €60,000 came from the two EMS member churches in Hesse, the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau (EKKW) and the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck (EKKW). The Protestant Church in the Palatinate also launched a fundraising campaign, and eventually churches and institutions far beyond the EMS Fellowship made funds available. The Northern Church, for example (through its Ecumenical Service and theology students in



DESPITE ALL THE DIFFICULTIES, WORK CONTINUES AT THE AHLI ARAB HOSPITAL

Pictures credit: Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem & the Middle East



Pictures credit: Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

Greifswald), congregations of the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland and the Lippe Regional Church, Evangelical Old Reformed congregations in the County of Bentheim, the German-Palestinian Society, a group of former German teachers in the Cypriot capital Nicosia, as well as numerous generous individual donors, all contributed to the result.

This money is currently being used to fund what is expected to be more than 200 gastroenterological surgeries to be carried out at the hospital between March and June 2026.

In practical terms, this means more than two hundred lives saved! However, a certain fact is that our efforts will not bring back to life tens of thousands of people who have died, including far too many children. But every donation that helps stabilise the health of a person in dire need means a life saved.

We have received a message of thanks from our Anglican brothers and sisters in Jerusalem for this enormous support – a message of thanks that we are happy to pass on here!

Uwe Gräbe



For more information, do to:
j-diocese.org/healthcare-3/

Does Gaza call for a different theology?

This book is dedicated “to the people in Gaza who endure a genocide yet continue to be resilient”. This sets the tone for the entire book. Indeed, “genocide” is arguably the most frequently used term in all the essays collected here, closely followed by “empire” (or alternatively, “settler colonialism’s eliminatory imperium” [314], referring to the State of Israel in conjunction with the USA and European powers) and finally a “prophetic” theology, the antidote to genocide and empire.



Mitri Raheb & Graham
McGeoch (publishers)
Theology after Gaza.
A Global Anthology,
Cascade Books,
Eugene, Oregon 2025,
502 pages, € 32

The book does not originate from the fringes, but from the very heart of the current global theological discourse. Namely, from a programme of the Council for World Mission (CWM), which was formed through the merger of such historically significant missionary societies as the ‘London Missionary Society’, the ‘Commonwealth Missionary Society’ and the ‘Presbyterian Council for Missions’. The General Secretary of the CWM, the world-renowned Korean theologian Jooseop Keum, also contributed a highly complementary

foreword. However, this book by Mitri Raheb, a Palestinian theologian who studied in Hermannsburg and Marburg, is unlikely to find a publisher in Germany. He edited it in collaboration with Graham McGeoch, professor at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. The authors of the individual contributions lecture mainly at Anglo-Saxon universities where post-colonial studies, with their subdiscipline of ‘settler-colonial studies’, have been developed in recent years.

As for what ‘theology after Gaza’ might ultimately be, the individual contributions offer a wide variety of different answers. In Raheb’s opinion, it is a theology that exposes Israel as the “ultimate settler colonial project” or as a “genocidal state” – and thus opposes a Western discourse that is pro-Zionist in that it “demonises” the Palestinians, for instance, by condemning the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023. A scholar from Louisville, Tennessee, agrees with this: anyone who condemns this attack (with its sexualised violence, the very existence of which is immediately called into question) in a similar manner to the genocide that has been ongoing since then is engaging in a fatal ‘bothsidesism’ [242]. In the opinion of a lecturer from Boston, the only remedy against the strategy of ‘extractivist, patriarchal and racist capitalism’ [281] as expressed here is a global alliance of resistance movements comprising women and indigenous peoples from North and Latin America, through Kurdistan, to Gaza...

To be clear, it should be borne in mind that a 'theology of Gaza' is not in itself an illegitimate project. After every catastrophe that shatters civilisation – particularly when it is manifested by such excessive devastation, suffering and loss of humanity as witnessed since 7 October 2023 in and around Gaza – theology is called upon to engage in renewed, self-critical reflection, which must at times also break with traditional ways of thinking. However, when this 'theology after Gaza' is pitted against a 'post-Holocaust theology' which, in the view of a Dublin scholar, constitutes a 'statement of Judeo-Christian triumphalism' [117], theological paths diverge in such a way that, in the end, all that remains is a disturbing sense of speechlessness.

Uwe Gräbe

**Surviving in a shelter:
between eyewitness account
and a political report**

Amir Tibon is a journalist for the liberal Israeli daily newspaper "Ha'aretz". Years ago, he moved with his family to the kibbutz Nahal Oz on the border of the Gaza Strip because he found a community of like-minded people there – people who believed in peace and coexistence with their Palestinian neighbours and stood up for them – until that hope was brutally shattered on 7 October 2023 and in the months that followed. Two narrative threads alternate chapter

throughout the book: the first is the thoroughly researched history of Nahal Oz since 1953; the second is the personal experience of surviving the terrorist attack, with two small children in a private shelter, in a minute by minute account. In the end, both narrative threads converge in the days following 7 October. What is striking in the first narrative thread is the effort to repeatedly engage with the Palestinian neighbours in Gaza: including their anger and grief when, as refugees behind the fence, they had their former farmlands practically right before their eyes. Even statements by Israeli founding fathers such as Moshe Dayan (who personally visited the kibbutz) are quoted to illustrate this position. Whenever possible, the residents of Nahal Oz organised meetings with the inhabitants of Gaza.



Amir Tibon,
The Gates of Gaza:
A Story of Betrayal,
Survival, and Hope in
Israel's Borderlands.
Little, Brown & Company,
Berlin 2024,
352 pages, € 13

Tibon has few good words to say about those currently in power in Israel; the Hamas massacre is portrayed as a manifestation of the total failure of Israeli policy. Nevertheless, there is never any doubt that a village community such as Nahal Oz, given its exposed geographical position, also serves the

purpose of protecting a vulnerable flank of the Jewish state.

The descriptions of the brutality to which the people of Nahal Oz were exposed during the terrorists' round-the-clock rampage and witnessed at first hand are extremely difficult to bear. Of course, one might also contrast this with the suffering of the population of Gaza over the following two years – but certainly not to downplay what had happened. Both sides want to be heard. However, whether it will be at all possible to return to an unreserved rapprochement within a reasonable timeframe is a matter on which the final pages of the book, in particular, cast reasonable doubt.

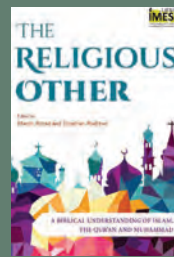
Uwe Gräbe

Christian-Islamic dialogue: the struggle to connect with the Muslim “other”

Martin Accad, a scholar of Islamic studies, has been President of the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut since autumn 2024; the EMS regularly sends students of theology there to attend a course of “Studies in the Middle East” (SIMO) program. Those wishing to understand his theological thinking and his intellectual and academic background from which he hails, this six-year-old publication is essential reading. This substantial volume is the result of two conferences held in 2018 and 2019 where mainly evangelical, Anglo-Saxon

and Middle Eastern scholars engaged in a collective struggle to find appropriate, biblically grounded approaches to the Muslim “other”.

Besides Accad himself, the book features contributions by more than 30 authors who, with few exceptions, are likely to be entirely unknown in the inter-faith circles of the traditional ‘mainline’



Martin Accad/Jonathan Andrews (pub.),
The Religious Other.
A Biblical Understanding of Islam, the Qur'an and Muhammad, Langham, Carlisle, Cumbria 2020.
759 pages, around € 20

churches (which, of course, would also be true in the opposite case). Among them are also a number of Christians from Muslim or Druze backgrounds.

The issues raised in the book can likely only be understood through the intersection of the specific Lebanese context – where religious affiliation initially implies an unalterable classification within a civil-political framework — with an evangelical perspective in which Islam is often “demonized” (or Muhammad is labeled a “false prophet”), while more liberal advocates of dialogue are accused of “idealizing” Islam.

The struggle here primarily centres on the question of salvation (at times this involves the confessional statement that Jesus is, after all, the only hope for Muslims too) and on the problem of the

extent to which followers of Christ with a Muslim background ('Muslim Background Disciples') can remain part of their mosque communities, or whether new church structures should not rather be established for them.

In several places here, Accad sets out his "kerygmatic approach" as a "middle ground" within the previously mentioned tension. Ultimately, the aim is neither to idealise nor to demonise Islam, but rather, in friendship towards individual Muslims and with historical objectivity towards their religion, to place the message of Christ (the 'kerygma' according to 2 Tim 4: 16–17) at the centre of the dialogue encounter with Muslims, whilst also allowing space for God's work.

Undoubtedly, these represent some new impulses and aspects within a long tradition of Christian-Muslim encounters at the NEST!

Uwe Gräbe

No peace without peace education

In his book entitled "Interfaith Education and Peace Education in Times of Crisis", Johannes Lähnemann, Professor Emeritus of Religious Education and the Didactics of Protestant Religious Education at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, traces the history of interfaith learning and peace education at "Religions for Peace" (RfP) – the wor-

ld's largest interfaith non-governmental organisation, founded in 1970, which unites representatives of various faiths in the cause of peace.



Interreligious and Peace Education in Times of Crisis. A History of Religions for Peace.
Pub. Johannes Lähnemann, EB-Verlag, Dr. Brandt, Berlin 2024, 198 pages, €22.80

www.religionsforpeace-deutschland.de

The book, published in 2024 as part of the series "Pedagogical Contributions to Cultural Encounter", sees Lähnemann slightly adapting the guiding principle of the Global Ethic Project founded by Hans Küng and transforming it into the central thesis of his book: "No peace between countries and religions without interfaith learning and peace education".

Indeed, "understanding different traditions is important to strengthen trust, respect and cooperation between all people and faiths", states the RfP's German website on interfaith education.

In a comprehensive historical overview, Lähnemann shows how RfP has broadened its focus from specific conflicts such as the Cold War and the nuclear threat to more comprehensive concepts of peace that encompass justice, human rights and the protection of life.

During the 10th World Conference of Religions for Peace in Lindau in 2019, it was noted, among other things, that peace education within and together with religions takes place at various levels: cognitive, emotional and practical learning.

Religious education thus plays an important role in cognitive learning: when people are well-informed, think critically and question things, they are less likely to be deceived and are less susceptible to embrace fanaticism, for example. Not only that. Religious education can contribute to the development of personal values. It can convey values such as compassion and respect for human dignity, or demonstrate how to resolve conflicts constructively without resorting to violence. Moreover, religi-

ous education can help people to live in solidarity with one another, to stand up for the weak and disadvantaged, and to tackle problems by taking responsibility for one another.

In the epilogue at the end of the book, Lähnemann, who has chaired the RFP's Standing Commission for Peace Education for many years, mentions the Schneller Schools alongside other examples: when Muslim and Christian children learn about and experience peace between the religions, then what is written in Romans 5:5 applies: 'Hope does not disappoint us'.

Judith Kubitscheck

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„...but by,
my God,
I can leap over
a wall“

Psalm 18:29 (NRS)



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