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SCHNELLER

MAGAZINE ON CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



ROOTED IN THE TURBULENT MIDDLE EAST
CRISIS AND CHALLENGES IN THE SCHNELLER HISTORY



EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools

ROOTED IN THE TURBULENT MIDDLE EAST

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Dear Reader,

the Schneller Schools are not islands of the blessed. Since they are part of Lebanese and Jordanian society, they are exposed to the same uncertainties and dangers as everyone else in the region. In the past, the people in charge in Khirbet Kanafar, Amman and even Stuttgart were repeatedly faced with the dreaded question: what will happen next? Will there be a future at all? Will the Syrian war spill over into Lebanon? Will the conflict between Sunnites and Shiites that has been fermenting for decades set the region ablaze and completely drive out religious minorities such as the Christians? Or, to make it quite clear:

how will the Johann Ludwig Schneller School continue to exist if all its teachers are supposed to receive 30 percent more salary by law? And what will the future be like at the Theodor Schneller School after years without a director when many things were neglected? The schools are continuously faced with existential problems. And each generation must find solutions for itself.

Against this background, the editorial team cast a conscious look at history to see the challenges other generations were confronted with in the 158 years since the foundation of the Syrian Orphanage. There is much that needs a thorough historical evaluation and classification, such as the difficult times from 1933 to 1945 (p 4). Contemporaries speak about bitter losses and new beginnings, such as Prof. Dr Samir Akel who had to flee as a Schneller pupil in 1948 and then experienced a new beginning in Lebanon (p 8). Or Reverend Dr Hartmut Brenner who experienced historic moments when he was director of the two schools from the 1960s to the 1980s (p 13).

The astounding thing is how much people experienced a feeling of safety. The commitment and stamina with which people have kept the Schneller spirit alive is also admirable. Certainly, this is no guarantee that the schools will master all crises in the future. But it is both a comfort and an inspiration in times when the mass of problems often appear to be overly enormous.

On behalf of the Editorial Team, I hope you will be similarly astonished by Schneller history while reading this issue as we were when we were compiling the information.

Yours



Katja Dorothea Buck



STICKING TO OUR HOPES OF RECONCILIATION

The Middle East is a region which to this day has experienced a back and forth of frontiers, the formation of states and changes in territory and spheres of influence. Its history is constantly interwoven with the eternal theme of conflict and reconciliation. As small educational institutions, the Schneller Schools have always been forced to find new ways to survive during this unending up and down. The previous institution, the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem, also had to deal with changes – and reconciliation. For example, after the Shoa, when the institution had to find a new site outside Israel. Since as recently as 1960, Schneller work has rested on two pillars, one in Lebanon and one in Jordan. All of a sudden, its work was located in two new countries. The multi-denominational country of Lebanon in the 1950s was a totally different situation than in the predominantly Arab country of Jordan. The schools also developed in different ways since they had to react to different conflicts in their environment.

During my visits over the past ten years, I noticed how different the schools are. Time and again, I am reminded about the story of Jacob and Esau. The Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon had to deal with the refugee problem and the Syrian conflict differently than the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman. The JLSS is confronted with the Lebanese school system and its difficulties. On the other hand, the TSS can now turn its back on its unsettled years which involved several changes of director and internal school problems, some of them home-made.

Despite all this, the two schools have still kept to the aim which distinguished

them right from the start – that of helping needy children to receive a solid school education and a good start into a life of their choice, no matter what their religion is. The two schools have never lost sight of this goal in the almost 160 years of Schneller work in the Middle East. They have dared to show their identity. Will they have the courage to boost this identity – the longer the better?

Reconciled means coming to terms with the different starting conditions of the other while having the same goals in mind. The two schools are called upon to perceive the other with interest and respect, to support the other in solidarity, to regard different features as necessary adaptations and compromises to the environment in which they are situated, and to learn from each other, either by training or further training of its educators and teachers, or in their leadership and management structures.

The political situation in the Middle East has again worsened. The Syrian war appears to be never-ending. The neighbouring countries are involved in armed and warlike conflicts. In my opinion this is all the more reason for the two schools to strengthen their common heritage, to place more emphasis on what they share in common rather than on their differences, to maintain good contacts beyond their borders and send clear signals in this way.

Will the schools be able to celebrate their 200th anniversary together? Two lively Christian institutions which are accepted in their countries and show what they can give their society: they are places



The painting by the Dutch painter Matthias Stom (17th century) shows the brothers Jacob and Esau over a dish of lentils. This part of the conflict-ridden relationship between the two brothers is more frequently portrayed in art history than their later reconciliation.

where needy children are given a chance in a shared, protected space, despite their differences, to learn that it is possible to co-exist and live a reconciled, peaceful life as equals; they are places where they notice that they can play an active role themselves in preventing war and violence.

But let's come back to Esau and Jacob: The twin brothers were forced to go separate ways. Their inheritance was not evenly distributed between them. They were going along totally different paths in life; and faced totally different challenges. Each had to protect himself in his own way. After a long journey, they both succeeded in taking a step towards each other. Each one noticed he had part of God's blessing, carried their father's blessing with them and that this blessing had an effect on each of them and it happened in both families or tribes. They were siblings and brothers in the faith. They were borne by the same God. Their reconciliation brought all those

involved additional value to their development and safety.

In the Middle East there are still many Jacobs and Esaus who are travelling separate ways and it frightens me how far they are drifting apart. For myself, I wish that the two Schneller Schools and all schools and institutions for children in the Middle East would receive the blessing of reconciliation which Jacob and Esau received. Here is the beautiful blessing:

Let the blessing of the God of Sara and Abraham, the blessing of the son born of Maria, and the blessing of the Holy Spirit who watches over us like a mother over her children, be with us all.

*Reverend Dagmar Bujack,
Swiss Association for the Schneller Schools*

A DELICATE MATTER THAT REQUIRES RESEARCH

The Syrian Orphanage during the years of National Socialism

The history of the Schneller Schools and their sponsors during the years of National Socialism is both a complex and a delicate matter. Previous studies failed to come to an overall assessment. Therefore, it would be all the more important to conduct extensive and historically authentic research.

In 2010, Roland Löffler summarised the latest state of research at the time in a book entitled “Lesebuch zum 150-jährigen Jubiläum der Schneller-Schulen in Nahost” (Reader on the 150th anniversary of the Schneller Schools in the Middle East) which the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) then published under the title “Frieden Leben Lernen”. In it, the Schneller family was referred to as “faithful to the German

emperor, patriotic and anti-socialist”. The chairman of the association in Germany, Ludwig Schneller, was not a member of the NSDAP and, in the struggle between church and state (“Kirchenkampf”) he held positions similar to those of the Confessing Church (“Bekennende Kirche”). “On the other hand, his nephews Ernst and Hermann belonged to the political leadership of the local NSDAP group in Jerusalem. They held regular meetings in the Syrian Orphanage. According to Löffler, “Political conviction and opportunism became interconnected in a way that cannot be clarified with any finality, but it was essential for an institution abroad to foster good relationships with party offices and the Foreign Office.”

These statements were made on the



Photo: Landeskirchliches Archiv

Germans in Palestine in 1935 at an NS rally on the grounds of the agricultural land belonging to the Syrian Orphanage in Bir Salem

basis of two previous studies on the subject. In 2001, Ralf Balke presented his study “Hakenkreuz im Heiligen Land. Die NSDAP-Landesgruppe Palästina”. He reviewed the religious communities of the Germans in Palestine and mainly devoted his study to the Templars whose leadership was in the hands of the NSDAP. He only mentions the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem in passing and at the time, it was directed by Hermann Schneller. However, the Syrian Orphanage “was a pivotal point of propaganda activities” of the Nazis in Palestine, especially because of the printing shop and bookshop there. In his work entitled “Protestanten in Palästina” (Protestants in Palestine) published in 2008, Löffler took a similar line, although in greater detail and from a different aspect. Here he mentions a memorandum submitted by Ernst Schneller in various versions between 1938 and 1943 in which the Syrian Orphanage was referred to as the “support base for German National Socialist nationality”.

People who were closest to Herman and Ernst Schneller contested such statements in the years that followed. They accused the authors of quoting things completely out of context. The sheer survival of the Syrian Orphanage was ultimately dependent on the flow of donations from Germany – and also from the foreign exchange transfer permits of the German Reich which were extremely difficult to obtain. Could it be that at least the ideological ingratiation towards the National Socialist authorities was also partly an attempt to somehow remain operational in view of the “incredible misery of children” in Palestine and in view of “desperately poor children” – as it said in correspondence between Ernst and Ludwig Schneller?

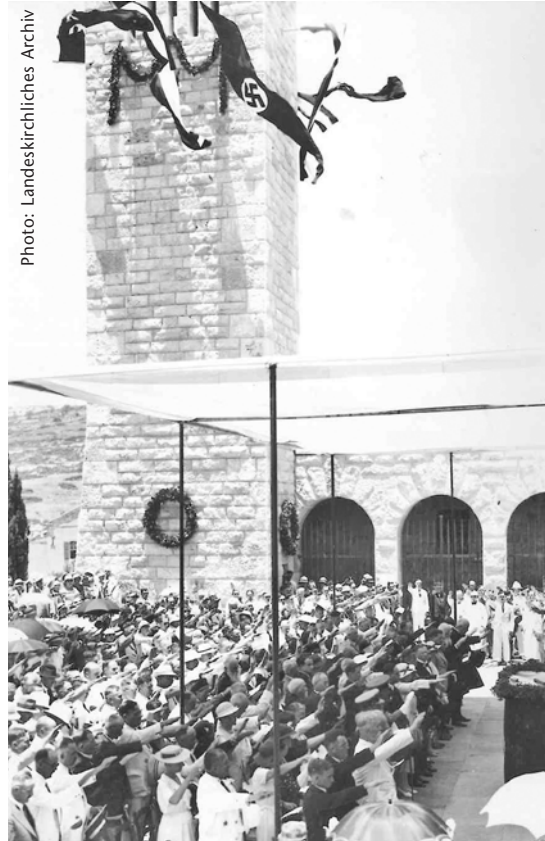


Photo: Landeskirchliches Archiv

Ingratiation to the NS regime or ideological conviction? The swastika flag was flying very prominently at the inauguration of the German military cemetery of Nazareth on 30 June 1935.

It is well worth while to cast an eye in some of the sources which have not yet been evaluated. On 15th January 1939, a celebration took place in Erpfinden in Swabia, birthplace of Johann Ludwig Schneller, founder of the Syrian Orphanage, on the occasion of his 119th birthday. An official publication was even produced for the occasion (Ludwig Schneller: Erpfinden. Eine Gedächtnisfeier, Köln-Marien burg 1939). Why go to such lengths

for a 119th anniversary? Did the organisers perhaps anticipate that there would soon be no more chance to hold such a celebration or bring out such a publication in view of ongoing political developments? The pamphlet makes no mention at all of the ruling powers at the time. The many photos of people welcoming each other show nobody greeting with the extended arm of the Nazi salute. Such a meaningful sign! At the end of the pamphlet, it says “Cherish your Redeemer with every loyalty and allow no power in the world to tear you away from him!” It needs no explanation which “power in the world” is meant here.

“The Syrian Orphanage is working with the Arabs of Palestine,” wrote Ernst Schneller in the very first sentence of his memorandum of 1938 – very probably to dispel any suspicion by NS authorities of collaboration with the Jews. Since the rediscovery in 2014 of the “Aufnahme-Haupt-Bücher” (Registration Books) of the Syrian Orphanage for the period 1887-1926 (see Schneller Magazine 4/2014, p 19), we have a totally different view of the story – there were of course many Jewish children at the Syrian Orphanage!

But admittedly there is another side to the coin – a deep-seated, natural anti-Semitism. It was still expressed in 1948 when the first issue of “Bote aus Zion” published after the war (the publication before the Schneller Magazine) explained why Hermann Schneller had bought land for a projected new building at the southern exit of Jerusalem in 1935 (see Schneller Magazine 4/2016, p 20-21): The reason was because of the increasing number of Jews emigrating from Poland and Russia and settling in the neighbourhood of the old institution: “They are really extremely



Photo: Landeskirchliches Archiv

The swastika flag flying in the inner courtyard of the Syrian Orphanage: in one of the first studies on the subject in 2001, the institution was referred to as “a pivotal point of propaganda activities” of the Nazis in Palestine.

disorderly, dirty and repulsive.”

The most critical is the judgement of Heidemarie Wawrzyn (Nazis in the Holy Land 1933-1948, Berlin/Boston 2013; and Zuflucht unterm Hakenkreuz. Deutsche in Palästina 1939-1950, Norderstedt 2014). Based on the lists of members of the National Socialist organisations in Palestine published here in full for the first time, many employees at the Syrian Orphanage were members of the Nazi party – and some of them had joined very early on. For the first time, Wawrzyn draws a line through to the time in which

adherence to the National Socialist ideology was no longer explainable by mere economic pressure: Wawrzyn claims that, on 6th May 1945, Hermann Schneller celebrated a memorial service on the death of Adolf Hitler with his congregation in the detention camp of Tatura, Australia, and his sermon was based on the Bible passage taken from John 15:13: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (NRSV) However, the sources which Wawrzyn quotes for this assertion are more than meagre; evidently the actual sermon had not been found. This is all probably driven by interests such as the suspicions reproduced by Löffler and Balke from local news agencies that Arab rebels had been supplied by the Syrian Orphanage with weapons during the years 1936-1939 and had trained people there in their use.

Ultimately, Wawrzyn openly admits her interest in reaching her conclusions: all Germans in Palestine were simply Christians; Christianity is per se anti-Jewish and therefore it is hardly surprising that anti-Judaism may have evolved into racist anti-Semitism under the circumstances. Admittedly, it is necessary to make certain distinctions when countering such generalised assertions.

In my opinion, no truly differentiated and comprehensive scientific study has so far been made of the history of the Syrian Orphanage during the years of National Socialist rule. What is available in the form of the studies mentioned above are only fragments, albeit necessary. Such a study (besides welcome discoveries such as the commemorative pamphlet of 1939) would probably also bring many horrifying facts to the light of day; and perhaps this would still be painful in certain cases even today

– for members of the family involved at the time as well as for Schneller friends in the Arab world. Nevertheless, I regard such an investigation as urgently necessary. In the meantime, a large number of serious organisations in Germany have come to terms with their history, and for the most part, this was a liberating process.

Whatever findings such a scientific study would bring to light, it would not change the fact that over the past 158 years, the Syrian Orphanage and the Schneller Schools have empowered tens of thousands of young people to master their lives in tolerance and mutual respect.

Uwe Gräbe

INFO

Research topic

“The Syrian Orphanage during the years of National Socialism” is an interesting research topic. If any young person is willing to write a doctorate thesis on this subject for example, he or she can be assured of full support from the EVS Secretariat, such as to search for scholarship providers or to gain access to source texts.

A DARING NEW START WITH TWELVE BOYS

From the end in Nazareth to the foundation stone in Khirbet Kanafar

The years from 1948 to 1952 are a special chapter in Schneller history. The Syrian Orphanage no longer existed and the Schneller Schools had not yet started up. But these four years show exactly what had already been at the root of Schneller work since 1860: the hope that things would continue despite all setbacks and losses.

May 1948 seemed to toll the death knell for the Schneller world. The last remaining school in Nazareth had to close down. The entire assets of the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem were confiscated, including all its annexes. Everything that had been built up in almost ninety years since 1860 was lost. The grief at this loss must have been

enormous for those who had devoted their entire lives to this work.

Even the former Schneller community was scattered to the four winds. Just after the outbreak of World War 2, the British had closed down the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem in May 1940 – for ever, as we now know today. At that time, the British were the mandatory power in Palestine and called the shots. The Germans had all left, even the Schneller family was no longer there. They had been deported to a detention camp in Australia. Nearly all of the many hundreds of the local children, apprentices, teachers and employees had returned to their home villages. The only annexe that remained open was in Nazareth. It was known as the Galilean Orphanage and that's where 152 children were still living and were taught by their teachers.



Photo: Landeskirchliches Archiv

The Galilean Orphanage in Nazareth – 14 remaining boys and their two teachers had to flee from here to Lebanon in May 1948.

But then in 1947/1948, it also became too dangerous for them to stay there when armed conflicts broke out in the time before the foundation of the state of Israel. Most of the children came from families in Beit Sahur and Bethlehem and it was still possible to send them home safely in early 1948. But for 14 boys it was too late.

Their families lived in Jaffa and Haifa which were already “behind enemy lines” and they found themselves in a region that had been taken by Jewish fighting forces. Two teachers had stayed with the children at the Galilean Orphanage, Salim Nasser and Iskandar Haddad, who both came from Lebanon. “One day in May 1948, an Arab officer came to us and told us we had to leave as quickly as possible. They were expecting heavy fighting in the direct neighbourhood,” remembers Samir Akel who was ten years old at the time and one of the 14 boys. The professor of education is retired and now lives in Reutlingen.

But he still has vivid memories of the time 60 years ago. “Our two teachers got hold of a lorry which we packed with everything we needed for our escape. And then we set off on the northern road.” Haddad and Nasser wanted to bring the children to safety in their home country of Lebanon. “Just before the frontier, the lorry’s engine broke down and simply wouldn’t move. We had no idea what to do next,” says Akel. A reconnaissance patrol from the Lebanese army then



Photo: Landeskirchliches Archiv

The foundation stone of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School was laid on Monday, 24 March 1952.

picked them up and took them to the first village behind the frontier. “There we spent the night in an empty bus because there was no other place for us to stay. On the next day, we went on to Beirut.”

For the first two weeks, the children were housed by friends of the two teachers. Then there was still the lorry with all their luggage on board. Nasser and Haddad set up a camp of tents for the children in the Beirut suburb of Furn Ash Shubbak where the 14 children aged between ten and 14 would spend the next three months while the two men set about searching for a permanent shelter. “Our teachers came back time and again to make sure we were all right. Their friends also came by to bring us something to eat. We washed ourselves in the sea,” says Akel.

Finally, Salim Nasser found a house in Kahhaleh, a small village in the hills outside Beirut. But it was still impossible to think about holding regular lessons there. A few weeks later, they were able to move to the empty building of the British Syria

Mission in Shemlan where the two teachers were finally able to start teaching the children again. It was hardly six months after the hasty escape from Nazareth when Schneller work restarted. All that Salim Nasser and Iskandar Haddad did for the children during those months cannot be admired enough. The children couldn't go back to their parents or relatives and because of the war, they had to rely completely on the help of their teachers. Nasser and Haddad did everything in the same spirit of "Father Schneller", which was the loving and respectful name which many generations of Schneller pupils called the founder of the Syrian Orphanage.

In summer 1949, the little group was joined by Hermann Schneller who had headed the Syrian Orphanage until 1939. He had spent several years in a detention camp in Australia and then returned to Germany. It is a witness to their firm conviction and strong faith in that he and his

brother Ernst refused to give up the idea of reconstruction at a new site despite the bitter experiences they had suffered over the previous ten years. The Executive Board in Germany also stuck firmly to this plan. Friends in Switzerland and the USA promised their financial support if the Schnellers ever decided to start up again. But this was not to happen in Shemlan.

Hermann Schneller had made contact with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) which acted as a kind of executor of Schneller affairs in the new state of Israel. The LWF asked Schneller to take over the directorship of the Evangelical School in Bethlehem, which he was very willing to do. Of course, he took the 14 boys along with him. Hermann Schneller hoped that from Bethlehem, he could make a new start close to the site of the old school. But this plan fell through as well. Collaboration with the LWF and in particular its representatives in Palestine did not work quite as well as hoped for.



Photo: EMS/Martina Weiblinger

Embedded in the countryside of the Bekaa Valley – the Johann Ludwig Schneller School

Finally, Hermann Schneller gave up the idea of setting up a new Syrian Orphanage in Palestine and planned a return to Lebanon where many former Schneller pupils lived. They had even asked him to come to them and set up a Schneller School there. "He wanted to take the twelve best boys with him. They would form the new generation of teachers in a new Schneller School," says Akel and admits quite openly that he was not originally chosen as one of the twelve. "Hermann Schneller only changed his mind after his sister Maria pleaded with him. She was my godmother and I had told her of my great disappointment of not being among the chosen boys."

The journey to Lebanon went by way of Jordan. In the commemorative pamphlet published on the 100th anniversary of the Syrian Orphanage, it says: "In August 1951, Reverend Hermann Schneller moved from Bethlehem to Lebanon together with several former employees of the Syrian Orphanage: senior teacher Elias Haddad and teacher Iskandar Haddad, both for the school, Mrs Agnes Schneller and Miss Maria Schneller for the household, and Miss Christine Speidel for the sewing atelier." Together with the twelve boys, they moved to the upper floor of an empty hotel in Zahle, a small town in the Bekaa Valley. School lessons started again.

A short time later on 5 September, they were joined by Ernst Schneller who acted as Executive Secretary of the Evangelical Association for the Syrian Orphanage in Germany. And together, the two brothers started planning the reconstruction. It was during this time that the idea slowly ripened to plan not one but two schools. The school in Lebanon should mainly be intended to train future teachers. For Jor-

dan, where many former pupils lived and dreamt of a Schneller School, the two brothers were contemplating a vocational school which would once train many craftsmen.

During this early phase, they also decided to register the school in Lebanon as a Lebanese organisation "to put it out of the reaches of hostile trustees", as Hermann Schneller wrote in the commemorative pamphlet. The ultimate lesson from two world wars was "that our mission property was open to take-overs." The choice fell on the National Evangelical Church in Beirut, which has remained the sponsor church of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School to this day.

But until the foundation stone could be laid for the new school, the right building site had to be found. From Zahle, the Schneller brothers searched for a suitable plot of land. "We boys were always on the look-out for possible land," says Akel. They would have liked to find something close to Beirut. "But everything was much too expensive." Khirbet Kanafar, where many former pupils lived and had also formed a small Evangelical community, kept on cropping up as a possible site. "But the main argument against it was the fact that it was too far off the beaten track," says Akel. The search continued without success.

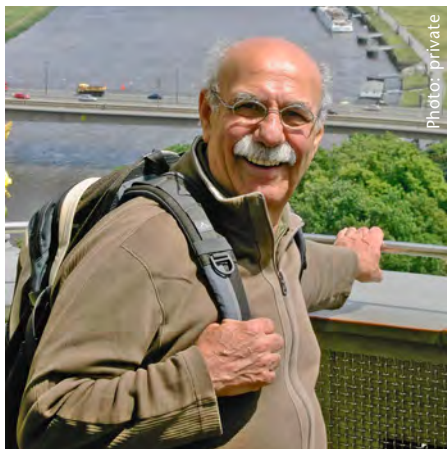
Apparently, however, the villagers were able to persuade Hermann Schneller during a visit to Khirbet Kanafar. "They offered him to find the necessary building site at a fair price within 14 days if he decided to build the school there." They agreed with a handshake, remembers Akel. And two weeks later, the Schneller friends in Khirbet Kanafar had actually negotiated

with many farmers and land owners in the village so that they were able to offer Hermann Schneller four and a half hectares (translator's note: about 11.12 acres) of connected building land directly on the country road at a reasonable price. On top of all that, they gave him an additional hectare as a gift. The purchase of the land took place on 29 January 1952.

“On 24 March 1952, we drove our children from Zahle to the building site in a large bus,” writes Hermann Schneller in his 1960 commemorative pamphlet. “The land had not been worked for many years. All that could be seen were a couple of stunted fig trees, many neglected vines and here and there thickets consisting of wild pears or gorse. But this is where the foundation stone was laid at the highest point on the site where the school chapel would later stand.”

On the day the foundation stone was laid, the Evangelical Schneller friends were joined by Greek Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim and Druze representatives. The watchword for that day could not have been more fitting: “And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly.” (2 Samuel 7:10 NRSV). In the commemorative pamphlet, Hermann Schneller also made extra mention of the scripture passage for that day. It comes from Luke 12:32: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Today, we know what has become of the “little flock” of yesteryear: two schools which are the finest in the Middle East, where children are given a chance to take



Prof. Dr Samir Akel experienced the escape from Nazareth as a child and was one of the 12 boys with whom Hermann Schneller started a new school in Lebanon.

their lives into their own hands and participate in their society as mature and responsible citizens, following on from the tradition of the Syrian Orphanage.

Katja Dorothea Buck

OF SPIES, MILITIA AND ANGELS

Hartmut Brenner about his time as director of the two Schneller Schools

Hardly anyone else can tell you more about the crises in the 1970s and 1980s than Hartmut Brenner. From 1968 to 1979, he was director of the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) and from 1983 to 1986, he managed the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS).

In 1968, you took over the management of the TSS. When was the first time you noticed you were living in a troubled region?

I had been 14 days in Amman when a car arrived from the German Embassy to deliver me a walkie-talkie. They had heard the Palestinians in Jordan were planning an uprising. The walkie-talkie would help me keep in contact with the German Embassy. Ernst Schneller advised me to refuse and later this turned out to be the right decision.

Why?

There were various Fedayeen militia in the refugee camp next door. Someone must have tipped them off about the walkie-talkie and they then assumed I was spying for Israel. One evening, hooded men were waiting for me in front of my house and they accused me of being an Israeli agent. They knew about the walkie-talkie. I told them they could search my house for it. Of course, they found nothing.

In 1970/1971, the Jordanian security forces crushed the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in Jordan. How did you live through this time?

I felt like the Horseman on the Lake of Constance (translator's note: poem by

Gustav Schwab). The Jordanian military forces were positioned very close to the school on the Amman side. On the other side of the school was the refugee camp with the Palestinian Fedayeen. Luckily, I only learnt later that some of the Fedayeen kept on hiding in the pine wood around the director's house. A Jordanian general told me then that they had repeatedly debated whether they shouldn't just simply shell the wood. But they didn't do that because they knew that a foreigner was living there.

That sounds like troubled times...

No, that's not quite correct. Except for the years 1970/1971, I enjoyed a beautifully quiet time in Jordan. Amman was a village where you could park your car without locking it.

But despite all this, a high wall was built around the site in your time.

That was necessary to keep the Bedouin animals away – they kept on coming onto the school fields and filling their bellies. At that time, we didn't have a farm yet. Later, the walls were necessary because of the refugee camp next door. We had planted olive trees and wanted to harvest them ourselves. In Germany, people didn't understand that. But walls in the Middle East are something very normal. Every house there is protected by a wall.

After your time in Jordan, you spent four years in Germany and then returned to the Johann Ludwig Schneller School as director in 1983. At that time, there was civil war in Lebanon. What effect did that have on the

school?

It may sound astounding but I never experienced any political or religious conflicts among our children or employees. But the war made life very complicated. For example,

badly injured his eye in an accident, we asked the Israelis for help. They immediately sent a helicopter which took the boy to the best hospital in Haifa and they were able to save his eyesight. It was all a bit ambivalent. In the same night, the Israelis shelled the boy's home village where his father nearly lost his life.



Photo: private/Brenner

Hartmut Brenner handing over a certificate to an apprentice at the TSS.

At some point in time, the Israelis withdrew. Who came then?

The Syrian secret service and they wanted to occupy some rooms in the school. I told them that I had not even provided the Israelis with rooms. That's the reason why they wouldn't

le, when the children went home in the holiday, they had to pass sector borders. There was one in the neighbouring village of Jib Jannine. We always accompanied the children there. The Israeli soldiers showed no mercy. They often kept the children waiting for many hours in the blazing sun or in the worst snowstorms.

have any rooms either. They accepted that.

Did the school get caught between the fronts?

Did you have any contact with other militia?

We had to deal with various groups many times. Right next to the school was the Israeli military camp and our water pipe ran through it. The soldiers destroyed the pipeline and from one moment to the next we had no more water. We had to route a pipeline around the camp. But there were also good moments. When one of our boys

Once the Druze ordered me to go to Beit ed-Din for interrogation. They thought that I was in league with the Falangists because of a cedar sticker on my car. The Falangists used a similar symbol. I received all my permits from the Shiite Amal militia whenever I had to go to Beirut on school business. As a foreigner I was the only person who was still able to go to Beirut.

Were you never frightened?

Yes, there were some moments when I thought my final hour had arrived. Once I was nearly shot by Israeli soldiers. I had just returned from Germany and was on

my way home. During my absence, the Israelis had issued an order that nobody was allowed to drive alone in a car. I didn't know anything about this and as usual I drove alone back to the school. At some point, I heard shots. The Israeli soldiers had fired warning shots in the air to stop me. When I finally stopped the car, they wanted to know what I had been looking for on the rear seat of the car. They had been observing me the whole time and indeed I had briefly turned to the rear to push a box of chocolates out of the sun.

How do you explain that everything always turned out well?

It's amazing that everything turned out well. I experienced a great feeling of safety. One experience I had in Beirut left a lasting impression on me. I was going through a totally unknown district when suddenly the shop owners everywhere started to let down their shutters. That was always a sure sign that people would start shooting in the minutes that followed. I didn't know where to turn to. All of a sudden, I saw a Schneller pupil standing on a street corner. He was waving me to come to him and he brought me to safety. To me he was something of an angel.

What remains your most important experience during your time in the Middle East?

I think it's developing an understanding for other people with different opinions and attitudes. You don't have to agree with everything but you should at least accept that people think differently and then act as yourself. This experience was always a help to me later when I worked as a religion teacher in Germany. I was able to take relaxed approach to everything.

Katja Dorothea Buck conducted the interview.

INFO

About...

Dr Hartmut Brenner (born 1937) has been connected to Schneller work for over 60 years. The first time he was at the JLSS was at a work camp in 1957. In 1958/59, he returned to the school as a volunteer. Ten years later, he was appointed director of the TSS in Amman where he stayed until 1979. In 1983, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) asked him to take over as director of the JLSS. In 1986, he had to leave Lebanon since it was too dangerous for foreigners there. Up until 2012, Brenner was member of the EVS Executive Board and still keeps contact with alumni and educators who were at the Schneller Schools, wherever they may be in the world.

RETURN TO A DIFFERENT LIFE

The challenge and potential of ecumenical cooperation

Dorothee Beck worked as ecumenical co-worker in Lebanon for three years. She returned to Germany at the beginning of January. Here she makes a first review.

The slogan of the return seminar I am attending next week is: “Life goes on after you return.” The registration procedure for reintegration into the German administrative system stressed me out right after my return. Now, one week later, I’m more relaxed, almost as if I was floating in total calm above the whole matter. But I still sense that this is only an intermediate step. Then, everyday life with its “inner-German worries” will soon take hold of me. It’s too soon to evaluate the past three years. The life phases are still too close to each other. At the same time, the return flight was an irreversible separation for me. As if I had entered one country and felt that I had left a different life behind me.

It was so exciting when I left to go to Lebanon in October 2014, despite the unstable political situation there. Anticipation and uncertainty – hooray! I had a job, that’s called a “mission” (!) in the Middle East! I was unsure whether my ecumenical assistance would meet the fundamental expectations that were very definite. In a nutshell, you think you know what you have to do but in fact you have no idea how. The “how” only came during my stay and in cooperation with all the people there. At this point, I quickly realised how completely unwieldy the inter-cultural relocation of co-workers is – and I had agreed to it in full possession of my mental faculties – as well as the fresh vital-



Photo: EMS/Beck

For Dorothee Beck’s Arab and Armenian colleagues at the nursery school in Bourj Hammoud (Philemon Project), this was a new way of using paper and paint.

ity and potential of ecumenical cooperation.

One of the most important sentences in the past three years came from Rev. Habib Badr, Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut (NECB), to which the Johann Ludwig Schneller School belongs. He dispelled my impression that I perhaps had the wrong cultural background and identity to face this challenge with the words, “I want you here as a German and as nothing else.” As such, I would understand this more and more as time went by and I was accepted into the community.

Perhaps that is the first conclusion I can draw about my conviction that it really does make a lot of sense to send co-workers to other countries when the contracts and partners bring with them enough openness for something that cannot really be defined before you have experienced it. Strangely enough, all the financing is in German hands, especially when state

money plays a role and is dependent on predictability and plannability. In my opinion, the only thing that is predictable is that things go differently when people with different personalities come together and establish relationships. And that's exactly where there is an enormous logic. That is reassuring. The decisive factor for the "success" of our Lebanese-German mission was that we remained curious about our opposite partners. We had to get used to not understanding. At the same time, this resonated with a lot of fascination. And time and again, this created more room to allow mutual fondness between us all. You can really learn something from someone you like. It stimulates and makes you creative.

During the farewell and evaluation process, I was often surprised at the situations which were the most intensive moments for my pupils, students and colleagues and what they regarded as their real challenges. For example, one colleague referred

to a short sentence I must have said at some time or other but had long forgotten. For her it was an important bit of information. I realised I can confidently leave it to my fellow humans in the Middle East to translate what I say into their own context.

Now I'm back and at the same time I'm starting all over again. I hope that I am strengthened by the slice of my life I experienced in Lebanon and for everything I do not understand in my own country.

Dorothee Beck worked as ecumenical co-worker at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School, the Near East School of Theology and in the Philemon Project of the NECB.



Photo: EMS/Beck

A favourite view from three years in Lebanon: at sunrise in summer, the West Bekaa Valley bathed in gold and copper light.

JOY TO THE HEART IN TROUBLED TIMES

Inauguration of the organ at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School

Brahms, Mendelssohn, and Böhm of all things. And in the pews, 13-year-old Lebanese and Syrian boys and girls who had never attended an organ concert before in their lives. Would everything go well?

It was a unique celebration at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) when all the bells in the tower of St Michael's Church called people to the first organ concert at this place in the twilight of 3rd December. Even Hermann Schneller in his time had designated the niche on the left of the altar as the place for an organ. But it took until now to ship the rarely played instrument from Scotland to

Lebanon and build it up again at the JLSS. It was all made possible by cooperation between St Sylvester Church in Elgin, Scotland, the organ builders Gerhard and Alexander Walcker, the organist Klaus Schulten and school director George Haddad. It was financially backed by the Evangelical Church of Beirut, the Schneller Foundation, the Swiss Association for the Schneller Schools and numerous donors who gave their support to the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) for this project.

Habib Badr, Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut, himself a great music enthusiast, introduced the programme for this special evening. Besides the many children from the JLSS boarding school, there were guests of honour present including the Deputy German Ambassador and his wife, the mayor and local Evangelical pastor of Khirbet Kanafar, the head of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Lebanon, and Minister ret. Herta Däubler-Gmelin from the Board of Trustees of the Schneller Foundation. Many members of the Church Council had come from Beirut to see Klaus Schulten gracefully play the keys and registers under the watchful eye of Gerhard Walcker.

Oh, and by the way, everything did go well. The children sat so very still listening to the unusual music, so much so that even the finest sounds of the romantic instrument were audible. Their eyes and ears were wide open. It felt really like Advent when the sounds of Brahms' choral preludes filled the church. Brahms



Photo: JLSS/Haddad

After 120 years in Scotland, the sound of the organ is now heard in the Bekaa Valley.

composed them in the year when the organ was originally built. And to help even the most unpractised listener overcome the slightest signs of tiredness, they were asked to sing aloud during the interludes. For example, “Wie soll ich dich empfangen” (Ah! Lord, how shall I meet Thee), “Herbei, oh ihr Gläubigen” (O Come, All Ye Faithful) and “Adeste Fideles” – a colourful medley in German, English and Arabic, the last carol even in Latin.

“This is exactly what we need in troubled times. It brings joy to the heart,” said a teacher. Even after the service, George Haddad was still shaking his head. “I still feel as if everything is a dream.” Without a doubt, it’s a beautiful dream. A dream that has come true.

Uwe Gräbe

INFO

Music volunteers

In collaboration with Director George Haddad, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools is currently working on a programme for short-term music volunteers. The idea is for interested musicians to travel to the Johann Ludwig Schneller School for a period of about one month to teach children on the organ or other instruments and then give a concert at the end. More details in the next issue.

AT LAST A HEATED DINING HALL

Stuttgart/Khirbet Kanafar (EVS/JLSS). Since November 2017, the kitchen and canteen building at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) again has a heating system. Rolf Bartel from the Waiblingen public utility company flew to Lebanon to complete another stint of modernising the heating system. Since a relatively new but oversized boiler had been installed in the building next to it, the Elisabeth von der Decken Hall, the obvious solution was to connect the heating systems of the two buildings. “It was a very special moment for the kitchen staff when they noticed that the radiators in the kitchen and dining hall started warming up,” says Bartel who had used his stay at the school to refurbish the heating system in the girls’ boarding home, making it more efficient.

In the past few years, the engineer has modernised the entire heating system at the JLSS in several stages together with local colleagues. Since then, heating costs have dropped dramatically. “It was again a real pleasure for me this time to see that the local craftsmen responsible for keeping the heating system in service had become a little more skilled,” says Bartel.

GENERATION CHANGE AT THE TOP OF THE EVS

EVS Executive Board convenes for the first time

When it convened for its first meeting in January, the new Executive Board of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) elected Kerstin Sommer as its Chair and Dr Reinhold Schaal as its Deputy Chair. The committee has many new members. They will be introduced in detail to Schneller work during a workshop.

Every five years, the EVS members elect a new Executive Board. Over a period of many years, it was the usual custom for the freshly elected committee to quickly and unceremoniously re-elect the Chair and the Deputy Chair just after the election. However, this time, many of the members who had served on the committee for many decades no longer stood for election – one of whom was the long-standing Chair Rev. Klaus Schmid. So, it was obvious before the election that there would be a change of generation at the top of the association. On the one hand, many new, younger mem-

bers would sit on the Executive Board. On the other hand, the election of the Chair could not simply take place ad hoc immediately afterwards.

The new Executive Board has now done this in a quiet setting. During its first meeting in January, it elected Kerstin Sommer as its Chair and Dr Reinhold Schaal as its Deputy Chair. The two have been acquainted with Schneller work for many years. Sommer is Regional Youth Coordinator at the Protestant Church of Baden and through her post as Chairperson of the Regional Youth Network in Baden-Württemberg, she has excellent professional and political connections.

Schaal is coordinator for the State of Baden-Württemberg and works at the Ministry of the Environment in Stuttgart. For over 20 years, Schaal has served as Treasurer on the EVS Executive Board. The two chairs are members of several committees within the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and are well acquainted with cooperation with the parent organisation of the EVS.

Other posts were elected during the first meeting of the Executive Board. For example, Christian Kissling will take over the post of Treasurer in future. Kissling is new to the committee. Ten years ago, he got to know the Schneller Schools on an “Alternative Voluntary Civil Service Abroad”. He works as a teacher for Protestant religion and business administration at the Commercial College in Göppingen and does voluntary service in district youth work.



Photo: EMS/Feist

The new EVS Chair: Kerstin Sommer

The post of Secretary is shared by Reverend Christian Kurzke and Dr Silvan Eppinger. Kurzke was already a committee member during the last period of office. He is partly responsible at the Evangelical Church in Central Germany for leading a rural community in Thüringia and partly for performing pastoral work with refugees and migrants in the Church District of Gera. Within this framework, he also coordinates aid projects from the Evangelical Church in Central Germany to Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Although Eppinger is new to the Executive Board, he knows about Schneller work as he completed his voluntary service at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in 2001/2002. He holds a doctorate in law and is also a graduate in Islamic studies. He works as coordinator at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Baden-Württemberg.

The EVS Executive Committee also elected Musa Al-Munaizel and Reverend Bernd Apel as representatives on the Executive Committee of the Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace. Al-Munaizel is well acquainted with Schneller work. From 2004 to 2011, he worked as educational adviser at the Theodor Schneller School in Amman and introduced the concept of peace education. Today, he lives in Berlin and is managing director of the iKita life aid organisation, an integrative day care centre. He also lectures at the Humboldt University. Apel is pastor at the Protestant Church in Hessen and Nassau. He is a graduate in religious education and works in Protestant adult work. Since 2003, he has also been regional pastor for ecumenism in Giessen and the surrounding area.



The Deputy Chair is assumed by Dr Reinhold Schaal.

Another member who is back on the committee is Anselm Kreh. From 2003 to 2006, he was head of education at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School and started many things there that are still in existence today. He passes on his love for Lebanon to all those interested during trips to the small country. He also regularly takes groups to the Schneller School and is one of the best multipliers of Schneller work in Germany.

A new member of the Executive Committee is Reverend Susanne Gölz who studied at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut in 2010/2011 and during this time, she often visited the Johann Ludwig Schneller School. She is currently Württemberg pastor and lecturer at the Evangelical boarding for students of theology in Tübingen ('Evangelisches Stift'). Another new member who is by no way new to Schneller work is Martina Waiblinger. She worked in the EMS PR department for many years and was on the Editorial Team of the Schneller Magazine until 2003. Her photos of Jordan, Lebanon and the Schneller Schools are well known far beyond the circle of friends of

Schneller work. Waiblinger currently works as PR Officer at the Protestant Academy in Bad Boll.

In the upcoming weeks, the newly elected and re-elected members of the Executive Committee will attend a workshop lasting several days in order to set solid foundations for committee work over the next few years. They will deliberate on how the Executive Committee can bring progress to the association's work and what new ideas it can inject in its cooperation with the two Schneller Schools. We wish all committee members every joy and God's blessing in their new tasks.

Katja Dorothea Buck

INFO

New members

2017 was a good year for the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS). The association won more new members than it has done in a long time. 20 persons joined the association, among them several young people.

Officially, the association currently has 296 members, although the number of people who are Schneller friends is several times higher. It would be an encouraging sign if even more people from this large group would decide to transform their affinity to Schneller work into becoming official members of the EVS.



Photo: EMS/Feist

All the members of the new Executive Board together with departing members shortly after the election at the EVS General Meeting in October 2017.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO NEW MEMBERS!

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) supports and accompanies the work of the Johann Ludwig Schneller School in Lebanon and the Theodor Schneller School in Jordan. Its special task is to offer poor children school education and vocational training at the Schneller Schools. The EVS supplies information about churches and Christians in the Middle East in its publications and at its events.

The EVS publishes the Schneller Magazine four times a year and sends it to readers free of charge. Subscription to the magazine does not automatically bestow membership to the EVS Association. **Dear Reader, we would be delighted to welcome you as member of the EVS** and receive your support not only for the Schneller Schools but also the work of the editorial team.

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

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for the Schneller Schools**

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SHEEP GRAZING DESPITE INTIMIDATION

EAPPI accompaniment in the Jordan Valley

Mahyoub is thrilled to see us. Meanwhile, he calls us his family since we come to see him twice a week and accompany him and his sheep into the mountains. He doesn't feel safe going on his own any more.

Mahyoub is a Bedouin from Khirbet es Samra, a small community in the north of the Jordan Valley. His family owns about 200 sheep and goats. Mahyoub has not enough money to pay for fodder, so during the day he takes his sheep into the surrounding areas where they can find enough plants to eat. The land where the animals graze actually belongs to his family and he has the papers to prove it. Mahyoub and his cousins have pitched their tents in a valley. On the hill opposite is an Israeli military post and since December 2016, there has also been a settlement outpost. According to international law, Israeli settlements and outposts are illegal in the occupied Palestinian regions.

Life as a shepherd in the Jordan Valley has always been hard. But since the outpost was built, it is becoming increasingly unbearable. Mahyoub is afraid of the settlers. On his own, he only dares to go along the side of the valley directly behind his tents. But meanwhile, there is not enough grazing any more for his animals. That's why we from EAPPI have been accompanying Mahyoub and his cousins for the past few months when they go with their sheep onto the other side of the valley towards the outpost.

We call this protective presence. Our presence allows Mahyoub to bring the sheep to green pastures and he is less frightened of violent confrontations with settlers or the Israeli military. They are less likely to start a confrontation when international observers are present. Members of Ta'ayush, an Israeli human rights group, are also regular visitors to Khirbet es Samra. We like exchanging information with them and we agree on observation times so that the shepherds are not alone.

Although we laugh a lot, drink tea and Mahyoub enthusiastically boasts about his knowledge of German history, there is always a feeling of tension in the air. The outpost stands prominently on the mountain and Uri, the settler who lives there, often drives in his white Jeep along the road around the area where we are with



Vanessa Clarke (right) with the cousins of Mahyoub the shepherd

the sheep. He drives very slowly each way and observes us in his binoculars, takes photographs and this is what makes the shepherds nervous. Sometimes he calls the military. On that day, the soldiers told us that this was Uri's land and we should leave it. The Israeli authorities have marked parts of the area as a nature reserve and parts belong to a military training area. According to Mahyoub's papers, the land belongs to his family. We were ordered to cross over onto the other side of the road, the side which is the military zone. On that side, it is supposedly permitted to graze sheep. Every time, Mahyoub is told something different and every week we see the settlers.

Sometimes, they even come at night and drive their Jeep around the tents and sheep. They want to frighten the family and intimidate them. Once, Mahyoub's mother was alone at night in the tent when she heard the Jeep. "It was terrible. I could hardly move for fear and I didn't

know what to do." With life stories such as these, it is difficult to keep hoping for an end to the occupation and a just peace. However, we pin our hopes on cooperating with Israeli partners such as Ta'ayush who are fighting for reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis.

And our hopes are with the chil-

dren. They are unbelievably happy when we blow up balloons for them to play with. Once they came up with the idea of filling the balloons with water and washing liquid. This ended with them throwing water bombs at each other. When a balloon finally burst, we couldn't stop laughing. At moments like these, the girls are simply children and are diverted for half an hour from the hard life under the occupation. The children's laughter is confirmation for me that we must continue and we should not lose sight of hope.

Vanessa Clarke was ecumenical accompanier from November 2017 to February 2018.



Photo: EAPPI/E. Pritchard

INFO

EAPPI

Since 2002, the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Israel and Palestine (EAPPI) has supported local and international efforts to end the Israeli occupation and contributes to a fair and peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. All activities are based on international law and the relevant UN resolutions. EAPPI is a programme of the World Council of Churches (WCC) based in Geneva.

NEW BISHOP WITH SCHNELLER ROOTS

Ibrahim Azar is the fourth Lutheran bishop in Jerusalem

On 12 January 2018, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) installed Sani Ibrahim Charlie Azar to the office of bishop at the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem. In his sermon, Azar spoke of his Schneller roots.

Ibrahim Azar is fond of calling himself a “Schneller offshoot”. As he did at a purely coincidental meeting in Berlin in October 2017. The 56-year-old was on a visit to the Jerusalemverein (Jerusalem Association within the Berlin Mission Society). The topic of conversation quickly came to his upcoming appointment to the office of Bishop of the ELCJHL. “I hope that as many Schneller friends as possible come on this day. I’m also one of them,” he said earnestly and with pride.

The fourth bishop of the ELCJHL also clearly explained the importance of his connection to Schneller work in his sermon on 12 January when he was installed in office. “During my entire education, I was influenced by the Evangelical movement and missionary work in this country. I was born at the Schneller School in Lebanon where my father (Editor’s note: The Bethel Deacon Charlie Azar) worked. This school has educated many generations right up to the present day.” He was also related to the Deaconesses of Talitha Kumi. His great-aunt, Najlah Sayegh, was responsible for the school in Beit Jala for a long time.

“The education I received at the Schneller School, Talitha Kumi and the Lutheran School in Bethlehem had an enormous influence on me and made me



The newly appointed Bishop Ibrahim Azar welcoming the congregation in the Church of the Redeemer.

part of a wonderful community,” said Bishop Azar. Those who received an education of this kind were brought up to believe in mutual love and to respect what unites and not what divides. “We learnt that neither politics, money nor religion had the power to unite. Only the life we share – in all its sweetness and bitterness – unifies us.” That is why no distinction was made between Christians and Muslims at the boarding school. “We were all brothers and sisters.”

Azar studied theology at the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. He was Pastor at the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem for 30 years. He is married and has three daughters. One of them is currently studying at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut. When asked in an interview whether he would ordain his daughter Sally as the first pastor of the ELCJHL, he replied that he would. It would certainly be a challenge for his church. “But theologically, there is nothing that speaks against the ordination of women.”

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools wishes Bishop Azar God’s blessing in his new office and every joy with his new duties.

Katja Dorothea Buck

FIRST WOMAN AT THE TOP OF THE MECC

Beirut (MECC). The Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) elected Dr Souraya Bechealany as its acting Secretary General at the end of January this year. The theology professor finishes out the term of Michel Jalakh who was appointed President of Antonine University in August 2017. Bechealany lectures in theology at the Catholic Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut. She is the first woman to fill this top position of the MECC.

During the meeting of the Executive Committee in Beirut, the participants stressed in a final statement “the need to preserve the historical identity of Jerusalem as a city open to all believers of the three monotheistic religions and the refusal of its Judaisation.”

CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

Beirut (MECC). Shortly before Easter, it may seem somewhat out of place to refer to a film which deals with Middle Eastern Christmas traditions. But what the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) posted on the net end of last year deserves a mention whatever the season. Entitled “Bridges to Bethlehem”, the MECC produced twelve short films which present the rich diversity of Advent and Christmas traditions in the Middle East. Church representatives from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Iraq report on how their churches prepare for Christmas. A number of different liturgical elements from the four church families are presented (Oriental, Orthodox, Catholic and Evangelical).

www.mecc.org



Obituaries

The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS), the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and the Advisory Committee of the Study Programme in the Middle East (SiMO) sadly mourn the passing of **Dr D.Th. Dorothea Vorländer** who died at the age of 77 on 17 January 2018. Together with her husband Hermann, she built up the SiMO programme with great commitment and remained part of it for many years. She selected many of the students and made use of the experiences she had gained in Lebanon. The booklet she published long remained one of the rare books on Lebanon which was written from a Protestant viewpoint and was readable by a broader public. As she grew older, we got to know her as a kind, loving person who brought enrichment to all those around her also outside of her public life. Without her, SiMO would not have become what it is today. In addition to Paul Löffler, Wolfgang Hage, Wolfgang Schwaigert, Georg Richter, Helga Anschutz and Boulos Harb etc., Dorothea Vorländer was there right from the very start. She remained true to the association and did whatever was needed. We will honour her memory with gratitude.

*Prof. Dr Martin Tamcke, Chair of the
SiMO Advisory Committee*

Yeghia Yeghiayan, who belongs to the world-wide circle of Schneller friends, passed away to eternal rest at the age of almost 99. In the 1920s, relatives brought Yeghiayan from his Armenian homeland to the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem. After receiving his school leaving certificate, he completed his apprenticeship as an electrician at the Orphanage and later stayed on as an employee. He was the last person to leave the Orphanage in 1940. His career took him to many countries until he finally settled down in Canada and now died in Montreal.

Yeghiayan maintained contact with Schneller work in Germany even late in his life. At the 150th anniversary in 2010, he sent a video message to Stuttgart in which he again emphasised the enormous gratitude he still felt for the Syrian Orphanage. With Yeghia Yeghiayan, the last former pupil of the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem has now died. The Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools will hold his memory in gratitude.

*Reverend Dr Uwe Gräbe,
EVS Executive Secretary*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

We are delighted to receive feedback from our readers. Praise as well as criticism allow us to continue our work with the Schneller Magazine. However, we reserve the right to edit your letters for space reasons.

I have been reading the Schneller Magazine with great interest and personal benefit for several years. It opens my eyes to Christian life and the people in a region which I knew very little about before. Indeed, it is the personal articles which affect me deeply. In the end, there was no other way for me but to use the article which appeared in Issue 4/2016 about the hope of Advent for my sermon. The author's words expressed so much hope in faith that this witness was also a comfort for the congregation here and the meaning of advent was again explained from another point of view. At the same time, a bridge of prayer was spanned to the Middle East. Thank you very much for that.

Reverend Corinna Clasen, Meisenheim

It is always a pleasure for me as former member of the EVS Executive Committee to keep up-to-date with activities in the Middle East by reading the Schneller Magazine. The whole package is very attractive. It never ceases to encourage me to browse through it as soon as it arrives in the mail and I immediately have to stop what I was doing before.

Georg Kazmaier, Grabenstetten

I am sending you my wishes for a Happy, Healthy and Blessed New Year 2018 with renewed thanks and appreciation for another excellent Schneller Magazine 4/2017. The slogan "Life in abundance – against a culture of death" could not have been more fitting as a Christmas message in the present global situation, especially when one looks at the Middle East! The reports about the schools are written with an honesty that is pleasantly critical and contain an encouraging breath of hope at the same time. Today, I read out the moving text by Mary Jarjour from Damascus – "Colourful threads against the darkness!" – at a meeting of the theological Emeriti (pastors and partners) from the Goslar region – as the opening passage for a reading of my autobiography. The audience listened with rapt attention.

Prof. Dr Johannes Lähnemann, Goslar

I think those two first articles are the best I have read to date – or perhaps their subject matter had been completely entranced. I always love reading the magazine and I found issue 4/2017 was as ever excellent and more importantly, essential advocacy for this region

Rev. David Longe, Jerusalem

For a long time now I have hoped to have the time to get in touch with you. I am a former J. L. Schneller Schueler. The Schneller name for me is rescue, love, caring, succour, peace, joy, enduring friendship, compassion, aid, sacrifice, beauty, big dreams, guidance, direction, building, uplifting, and many more things to enumerate. My purpose in this letter is to acknowledge the mighty and hard work

you have done and are doing on behalf of every one whose life has been touched by the Schneller spirit, to keep the great Schneller legacy alive, and its eternal flame burning, eternal. Your strong commitment and unwavering dedication shine through every page in the Schneller Magazine.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! To you and the rest of your team for a tremendous job beautifully done.

Maurice Sackett, Abu Dhabi

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SCHNELLER

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But for me it is good to be near God; I have made
The Lord GOD my refuge, to tell of all your works.

Psalm 73:28 (NRSV)



**EVS Evangelical Association
for the Schneller Schools**

