“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.” Isaiah 60:1

EVS Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools
Dear Reader,

This issue is the 49th edition of the Schneller magazine for which I share responsibility. After more than twelve years, it is time to take leave. Even though I am only leaving because the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Wuerttemberg obliged me to, I look at the change as an opportunity – for the work of the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) and for me personally. New people will bring new initiatives and new tasks will awaken new skills. What is and remains important is to be open to the challenges that occur and to be open for people who live differently, have different faiths and maintain different points of view. The Schneller schools have always managed to achieve this so impressively in the past 151 years.

And this is precisely the topic of this issue of the Schneller Magazine: how do we behave towards others? How do we stay open but still remain ourselves – for example in religious education? In Germany, we are taking our first tentative steps in this field. We present you with three different models from the Middle East which are all interested in teaching tolerance and identity without hiding the differences: at the two Schneller schools and the school of the National Evangelical Church in Ras Beirut. And still, all three schools have totally different ways of going about it.

As always, we ask for your support and donations for the work of the Schneller schools. In Lebanon, for example, the government has again raised teachers’ salaries, in some cases by up to 20 percent. This places the Johann Ludwig Schneller School before enormous challenges!

Thank you very much for all your support.

Sincerely yours,

Rev Andreas Maurer
EVS General Manager
AN OPEN WINDOW TO GOD

To understand an icon, you have to contemplate it and admire it. You have to look for a reality in it that is invisible. It is a revealing presentation. Let us attempt to perceive what the icon of the Nativity of the Lord by Andrei Rublev from the 15th century reveals to us. It has been interpreted and analysed many times over the centuries up to the present day. I will base my analysis and interpretation on “photographic” criteria.

When you look at this icon, the first thing you see is that it has no linear perspective. There is no vanishing point, no imaginary line, there is not even a background or a landscape behind the figures. In iconography, this is called inverted perspective. The vanishing point is placed at the front, outside the actual icon image. Inverted perspective allows the portrayal of two different worlds, the real world and the spiritual world. Thanks to icons, the spiritual world and our world contemplate each other, permeate each other, but still remain apart.

A traditional artist paints what his eye sees: the elements that are further away are the smallest. This produces a perspective of depth. In iconography, on the other hand, the starting point is the contemplating believer himself. Lines emanating from the spectator run into the background of the icon. This could be explained in the following way: the viewer must be able to perceive that the earthly world in which he is, is much smaller than the spiritual world which is presented to his eyes. In this way, the spiritual world in the icon opens up to the believer instead of closing itself as with a linear perspective.

In this icon there is only one level, the foreground. There is no background. Everything seems to be placed on one level. The monuments are stacked one above the other, they are placed on top of each other.

The persons are simply arranged. A person can be as large as a tree in front of which they are standing. The head of the figures often measure a twelfth of their body (instead of a tenth). Maria is lying in front of the cave in the pose of a woman who is resting after giving birth. Her silhouette is monumental. She takes up a lot of space, a tenth of the entire surface area because she is the most important object in the icon. The proportions are incorrect on purpose. The most important person is enlarged at the cost of the others. The entire picture composition is centred on the grotto. This is the point to which everything flows. Jesus lies there as if he had just come out of the earth.

Every photo needs light and every light throws a shadow. In the Nativity of the Lord icon, everything shines in a particular light. Wherever you look, you see beautiful well-lit figures which throw no shadow at all. Even the animals and plants have no shadow. The scenes depicted are bathed in a golden light whose source remains unseen. It is impossible to say where the light comes from or from which side, but it is golden and has an immaterial shine. This golden light has a spiritual meaning: it reflects the state of the chosen ones in paradise. The artist uses it to create a spiritual atmosphere to help the believer in his contemplation.

The eyes of the figures have an absent look. Maria turns her back on her son. Her look is directed at something outside of the icon. The other figures, with the exception of the ox and the ass, look past the central point of the icon, the Nativity of the Lord. They seem to be occupied with other things than the contemplation of a new-born child.

An icon is neither a portrait nor a photograph. Neither does it want to touch us, nor is it emotional. There are no icons that show Christ suffering. Nowhere do you see figures weeping or laughing. They never show their feelings outwardly, they are always reserved and solemn. Their eyes are sometimes open as if they were blinded by the light they are contemplating. Their mouths are small and closed – an expression of conscious silence.

They say that icons are “a window onto the invisible, the absolute”. They say that through them you can reach God as through an open window. Even if you can view wonderful icons in museums, even if icons were sold regularly at churches or at tourist centres, an icon is not an object of art or commerce. It must be honoured in an altar room or at a place at home where you pray.

Nicolas Abou Mrad is Assistant Professor for the Old Testament at the University of Balamand in Lebanon.
A COLONIAL ATTACK ON ISLAM?

Islamic schoolbooks in Jordan polemise against missionary institutions

It is well known that the Schneller schools originated from the missionary work of the Protestant Church in the Middle East. Both Christians and Muslims hold the schools in high esteem as excellent educational institutions. However, many Islamic schoolbooks resort to polemic arguments, prejudices and untenable statements when they refer to the work of the missionaries and missionary societies.

The schoolbook “Islamic Education”, which is used in the last two upper school grades in Jordan and has been reprinted since 1998, is an example of the distorted image of Christian missionary societies in Islamic schoolbooks (not only in Jordan). An entire chapter entitled “Mission and its influence on the Islamic world” in a unit on colonialism contains details on how to understand the Christian mission. Mission was a method to destroy unity among Muslims, it says. Mission fanned the flames of ethnic and denominational conflict and promoted nationalistic tendencies in order to better subject the Arab-Islamic world. Its main aim was to turn Muslims away from their faith and alienate them from their own culture. The call to follow Christ was only in the pursuit of material interests and had detached religion from their lives.”

It says that mission had applied various methods to achieve its aims. It founded schools and universities to influence Muslims with western values and ideologies and to turn them away from Islamic values. The missionaries exploited the fact that people needed health care. It continues that the focus was not on providing medical help but on mission itself. They also set up clubs, centres and students’ halls of residence to spread western ideologies among young people. According to the text, another instrument of influence was to set up newspapers, libraries and publishing houses to distribute books which propagated western ideology and culture as being worthy of imitation.

Accordingly, the impacts of Christian mission are denounced as negative. The missions had spread “materialistic, socialistic and atheistic (sic!) ideas among Muslims”. They had distorted Muslim history as a series of struggles between dynasties and unjust wars and had depicted the Caliphs as tyrants who had blatantly abused their power. The missionaries had reviled the prophets and Islam, misrepresented Islamic rules of marriage and had stigmatised Islamic punishments as inhuman.

There is no question that such a presentation of the Christian mission and the institutions it had funded in the Middle East fails to reproduce the true history. In no way was mission “an institution of western ideological attack”. Rathermore, it arose mainly from a profound religious motivation. In no way was it a policy of destroying Islamic faith by turning Muslims away from God. Quite the contrary, mission was based on the deep conviction that faith in God in the Christian sense is the only correct path of salvation.

The mission schools made a not inconsiderable contribution to bringing the Arabic heritage back into people’s awareness. The mission schools started in the Middle East were the first to reintroduce Arabic lessons after they had been sadly neglected for many centuries under the Ottoman Empire. Arabian history also took an important position in school. It is not without good reason that many graduates from mission schools became pioneers in the Arabian national movement and promoted a revival of the Arab language.

When it comes to the allegation of splitting the denominational faith of Muslims, it should be noted that tensions between Shiites and Sunnis existed long before the missions arrived on the scene and this strife continues to the present day.

What is totally unacceptable is the description of missionary work. At no time was there any priority placed on teaching western lifestyles or of spreading secular or even atheistic ideas. Of course the management of the schools and hospitals was based on western ideas and concepts, and naturally these were conveyed to schoolchildren and patients, but the focal point was on providing real care for the needs of the population. After a short period of time, almost all missions stopped their operations.

Even the American University in Beirut originates from Protestant missionary work and has an excellent reputation that is known way beyond the country’s borders. Numerous Arabian politicians belong to their alumni.
plots for the “Mohammedan Mission” and concentrated on Eastern Christians because they hoped this would further the missionising of Muslims in the long term. However, the hope of awakening Eastern Christians never materialised. Instead it led to the founding of Catholic and Protestant churches. So in the end, very few Muslims were converted.

Only educational and medical services were provided to Muslims. And this was accepted gratefully. The institutions set up by the missionaries are still examples of educational and social welfare for people today. Many schools and hospitals which are still financially backed by Christian churches today are among the best in the country. This applies, for example, to the German Protestant School (DEO) in Cairo, the Schneller schools in Jordan and Lebanon, to the majority of schools in Lebanon and to the St Joseph University and the American University in Beirut.

The schools enjoy a very high reputation among the Muslim population and governments and there is a large number of Muslims applying for entrance. At many schools, it has been a matter of course for many years that Islam religious education is taught by Muslims and education in interreligious tolerance has been a special rule at the schools. To this extent the accusations in the schoolbook lack any substantiation whatsoever. Nor is it true that the missionaries only portrayed distorted versions of Islam and its history. It is precisely because missionaries lived for many years in the Middle East, learnt the languages and became acquainted with the culture that they were often the first persons to propagate a differentiated image of Islam in the West.

It would be good if this problematic presentation of the Christian mission in Islamic schoolbooks became the subject of discussion in committees responsible for producing schoolbooks. The hostile images that are engendered here correspond neither to activities at the schools, nor to the more balanced description in history books nor to the official position of the Jordanian ruling house. No other government in the Middle East deals more with interreligious issues and promotes interreligious dialogue. This should then be reflected in the portrayal of mission in Islamic religious books.

Wolfram Reiss is Professor of Religious Studies at the Protestant Faculty at the University of Vienna. His book, Jonathan Kriener / Wolfram Reiss: Das Christentum in Schulbüchern islamisch geprägter Länder. (Christianity in the schoolbooks of Islamic countries) Vol. 3 Lebanon and Jordan, edited by Klaus Hock, Johannes Lähnemann and Wolfram Reiss by EB-Verlag Berlin will soon be published.
“WE DO NOT DIVIDE CHILDREN INTO GROUPS”

Religious diversity is experienced as enrichment at the JLSS

At the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) Christians and Muslims go to religious classes together. All pupils also take part in devotions in church. For George Haddad, director of the school, it is important that Muslim pupils are able to live their faith.

What do Muslim parents think about their children receiving Christian religious lessons at the JLSS?

So far we've never had any problems with parents, except five years ago when we introduced devotions for pupils of both genders at the day school. Only the parents of two pupils did not want their children to go to church. We explained to them that, in the Protestant tradition, a church building is only a building like any other on the grounds of the JLSS. The actual church is made up of believers who come to worship service every Sunday. So the children do not go to a Protestant church, they only go to the school chapel. Most parents at the JLSS, if not all, are very tolerant. They send their children to us so that they are brought up to be tolerant.

Are there Muslim children at the JLSS who do not want to go to religious classes?

So far it happened only once. During the times of political unrest in Lebanon, a few children expressed the wish to stop going to religious classes. We explained to them the aim of religious education at the JLSS, namely to learn something about the religion of the others and not to convert anybody. We also told them we respect every religion and we want all people to follow their religion and we want to prevent anybody from teaching them to be violent or to hurt others. Since then, we have had no more objections. All the pupils must attend religion classes.

About half the children at the JLSS are Muslim. Why is there no Muslim religious education for them at the TSS?

At the JLSS we celebrate Christian and Muslim festivals. In my opinion, religious education is bad and counterproductive if it separates children into two groups and makes a distinction between those who go to Christian religious classes and those who go to Muslim religious classes. I believe that all children should go to the same religious classes together. These lessons are based on peace education and tolerance and serve as an introduction to the belief contents of the other community. This is the way children learn to respect the faith of others and to realise that all people are brothers and sisters and are created by one God to be children with equal value. Peace education and an introduction to the Christian religion are already part of our religious classes. We try to cover Islam education by inviting guests on special occasions or by asking some of our own pupils to give lessons.

Why don’t you do that yourself? After all, you know Islam very well?

According to Muslim doctrine, it is not permitted for a non-Muslim to teach Islam. We respect this standpoint. This is a question of tolerance from our side. The governing body of the Schneller school in Beirut is currently evaluating my recommendation to include Islam education in our religious lessons which are provided for all pupils together. I hope we will be able to do this very soon.

What do you mean exactly by Islam education?

By Islam education, and also the teaching of Christian religion, we do not mean the usual instruction and teaching in all the details of a religion. What we mean is a short and general introduction to the Christian and Muslim religions with the focus on common aspects. At the same time, we point out differences as being different views, religious ways of expression and rites. They must be followed by the adherents of each religion but may not be directed against people of a different faith. In my opinion, this is the framework which the school can provide. A detailed and specific religious instruction is the responsibility of the family, the individual, the church and the mosque.

For example, how do you teach about Advent and Christmas in classes where Muslims and Christians sit next to each other?

In the same way as we teach the Feast of Sacrifice and Ramadan. All these festivals are important to us. We celebrate and enjoy them and use them as an opportunity to make clear that religious diversity is a joyful and enriching factor in all our lives if we do everything in peace, love, respect and harmony.

Interviewed by Katja Dorothea Buck.
Religion is a compulsory subject in Jordan. State schools offer only Islam religious classes. So far, Christian religious lessons have not been given there because the various churches in Jordan have not yet agreed on a joint curriculum. Private Christian schools, such as the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman, must offer Islam education if they accept Muslim children.

The separation into Muslim and Christian religious classes has disadvantages from the viewpoint of peace education," says Musa Al-Munaizel, educational adviser to the TSS. “What is important is that children get to know the similarities of the religions.”

At the TSS, there has been an attempt for several years to make the rigid separation into Christian and Muslim religious classes more transparent. The first measure to achieve better mutual perception was to place the rooms where the lessons are given in the same wing and to paint a large rainbow, a cross and a crescent on the walls in the corridor. It is also normal for Christian pupils to go to Muslim religious classes when their teacher is ill and vice versa.

The TSS intends to make religious similarities into a realistic experience in a major project. Pupils of both genders will take part in classes of the other religion. While the Johann Ludwig Schneller School opted for joint religious classes, religion is not a subject at the Evangelical School in Ras Beirut. The reason why is explained by Laila Salibi Dagher in an interview with Mona Naggar. Dagher was headmistress of this school for many years.

The Evangelical School is one of the most prestigious schools in the western part of the city. How did it start?

Reda Jureidini founded the school in 1949. At that time, many Protestant Christians as well as Muslims from Ras Beirut sent their children to this English language primary school. After the death of Mrs Jureidini in the 1970s, the National Evangelical Church took over the governance. In 1976, I became headmistress of this school. When I started my work, there were only 15 pupils there. The civil war (1975-1990) had just started and many inhabitants of the district had emigrated or had moved to other districts in the city. From my work at other schools, I knew pupils who lived in the area. I called one after the other and in the end I had almost 250 pupils.

When Mrs Jureidini was headmistress, the school taught Christian religion. Later this was stopped. Why was that?

Living conditions during the war were very hard. There was no way we could know how long we would teach on any one day. We had to stop as soon as shooting began. And that happened very often. We therefore had to concentrate on the main subjects on the curriculum in order to get through the syllabus and to prepare for examinations. At that time, we stopped religious classes.

Even without Christian religious classes you called yourselves an Evangelical school. What is Christian at this school?

Every morning, we started with what we called a meditation, a short word about God. At Christmas and Easter, we told the relevant stories and we also related the stories of the prophets from the Bible and the parables. This is how we tried to teach an understanding of Christian morals. Every year at Christmas, the children sang carols which they had learnt during the year.

But even after the war ended, there was still no more religious education at your school. Why?

We tried teaching Christian values without religious education. One day, a father came to me and said he didn’t want his child to be taught Christianity. He suggested hiring an Islamic religious teacher for non-Christian children at the school. At that time, the Lebanese government decided that religion should only be taught separately by denomination. I could not accept to separate the children in my classes. I had banned any religious statement at my school. Pupils were not
How has the composition of pupils developed in the past few years?
The civil war also brought about changes in Ras Beirut. The number of Christians dropped and we have taken on more and more Muslim children. The primary school in Ras Beirut today has 209 pupils, only six of them are Christians. At our secondary school in Kfarshima, we have a total of 584 pupils, 51 are Christians and of those 18 are Protestant.

Why do Muslim parents send their children to an Evangelical school?
It is the word “Evangelical” that attracts people. We are not fanatics. We do not force any religion on the children. We teach respect, honesty and love. These are our main principles. We educate children to love their fellow pupils, whether they are white, black, Muslim or Christian. These are the Evangelical values that parents appreciate from us.

Mona Naggar asked the questions.

allowed to wear a headscarf, nor carry a Qur’an or a cross as jewellery. I didn’t want one pupil to know the religious affiliation of another. This is why Christian education was reduced to a minimum. What was left were the short meditation in the morning, the stories on church holidays and the hymns and carols. We are trying to integrate Christian values by indirectly teaching moral principles.

TRY OUT MIDDLE EAST COOKING

Hummus (a large bowl)
- 500 g dried chickpeas or tinned chickpeas
- 300 g sesame paste (tahini)
- Juice of 2 lemons
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 tablespoon cumin
- Flat leaf parsley
- Olive oil
- 200 g pine nuts

Preparation:
Soak the chickpeas overnight, then boil for about 2 hours until they are soft. Pour off the juice but do not throw it away! Mash the chickpeas into a smooth paste.

Add the tahini, lemon juice, crushed garlic cloves, salt and cumin to the chickpea paste and mash until smooth. If necessary, add the boiled juice from the chickpeas so that the paste becomes really creamy. Apply the paste to several flat bowls or plates, decorate the surface with parsley, cumin and olive oil. Carefully roast the pine nuts and spread them over the hummus.

You can sell the dishes at your market and donate the revenues to one of the two Schneller schools.

After enjoying a delicious meal, a bit of movement would be beneficial. Do you know the Lebanese folk dance, the Dabke? The dancers form a circle, hold hands or place their hands on the shoulders of their neighbours and stamp on the ground. The dance is accompanied by a drum. We can send you the steps for the dance or you can take a peek in youtube.com.

Reading is a good pastime during Advent. So we have a book recommendation for your children’s group (ten years and older):

Mistral, Laure and Duffet, Sophie: Rahel lives in Israel, Nasser in West Jordan. Verlag Knezebeck 2007 (publishers)

Tell us about your project and we will send you information about both or only one of the schools. Send us a photo of your event. We will place it on our website.

FROM PREJUDICE TO DIALOGUE – RELIGION AS A SCHOOL SUBJECT

Mona Naggar asked the questions.
VERY LITTLE TIME TO DEVELOP ONE’S PERSONALITY

Everyday life in the kindergarten of the Theodor Schneller School

Dorothee Beck from Fellbach near Stuttgart is currently working as a volunteer in the kindergarten of the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman. The qualified nursery school teacher is trying to pass on her own experience to her female colleagues and is delighted when the children can let their paper planes fly.

M iss, Miss ...!” and this is followed by a flood of Arabic words I don’t understand. However, I realise that Mohammad is annoyed about his neighbour Jazeed sitting next to him because he had made a crease in Mohammad’s paper plane – although it is very neat, the crease still does not belong there. With a dark expression on his face, he pushes his plane off the table. This is a scene from the kindergarten of the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman where I have been working for almost two months. There is a class of five four-year-olds and a class with 17 five-year-old children. Eight of the total of 22 children are girls. Four female teachers work at the kindergarten and offer the subjects Arabic, German and French. They learn various basic techniques for creativity and are encouraged to put their own ideas into practice. My colleagues are very open. They help me by keeping the group quiet and translate everything I cannot express in Arabic. Dorothee Beck

Education here at the TSS first means keeping the peace. It’s much less about long-term change. Few male or female primary school or nursery school teachers have completed a course in pedagogical training. My female colleagues in the kindergarten sense that their previous teaching methods are insufficient for the children or themselves. They feel they are under pressure to teach the children how to write and do sums as quickly as possible. As a result, there is very little time and energy left for personality development, developing social skills or for movement education. And there is a great need for this, as the example of Mohammad shows.

When the timetable permits, I offer activities which let the children experience learning and playing which they would not otherwise get during lessons. This provides the children with variety and physical activity. They learn various basic techniques for creativity and are encouraged to put their own ideas into practice. My colleagues are very open. They help me by keeping the group quiet and translate everything I cannot express in Arabic.

The headmaster has given me the task of supporting the teacher team to develop educational concepts and develop a “curriculum”. I communicate in English and a colleague translates into Arabic. This is not always easy but it’s a lot of fun. One day we have heated controversial discussions, the next day we encourage each other with enthusiasm because we have just discovered connections as a team and contemplate new approaches.

For myself, I learn to accept situations which previously did not fit into my educational world view. It makes me happy when I manage now and then to let the kindergarten children be a little more like children, for example when we let our homemade planes fly in the open air. And what about Mohammed? Suddenly, he can overlook the crease in his paper plane. Joyfully, he flies his plane together with the others. Today, frustration did not have the last word.

Dorothee Beck

IMPORTANT BRIDGING FUNCTIONS – THE PARENTS’ COUNCIL

As in Germany, it appears that the issue of the parents’ council is a woman’s job even in Lebanon. Nine of the ten members of the parents’ council at the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) are women and all except one Druze woman are Muslims.

For Leila Sati, it goes without saying that she takes part in the school which four of her children attend. “I often come to the school anyway and talk to the teachers,” says the President of the parents’ council.

In Lebanon there is a law that says every school must have a parents’ council. The Ministry of the Interior controls the elections so that the schools cannot intervene or manipulate. Parents who are employed by the school and the parents of children who receive a scholarship cannot be nominated for election. The current parents’ council of the JLSS, elected in November last year, regards its most important function in solving the problems of children at school. “We always stand by
ing with another burning issue: the German teacher has left the school. Nobody wants to do without German classes, says Leila Sati.

The good relationship between the director and the parents’ council is very much appreciated on both sides. “Many parents are frightened to enter into direct contact with teachers,” says George Haddad. The parents’ council and in particular the President have an important bridging function between parents, teachers and the management. “I encourage them to exercise their role vigorously,” says Haddad.

The parents’ council participates in other ways too. In winter, the members collected money through various activities and helped to finance an urgently needed photocopier for the school. Sometimes they sell cakes they have baked themselves. Or they buy sweets at a low price and then sell them in the school at the normal price. The schools receive the surplus and the money goes to the photocopier, for example, or to school festivals and theatrical performances.

Leila Sati is very glad she is supported by the director and that he always has time for her. “This work is something new for me. It’s a lot of fun,” she says. She likes it when the parents come to her and tell her about their children’s problems and ask her to help. “I support the schoolchildren of both genders as if they were my own children.”

Martina Waiblinger
With Mitri Raheb, the Evangelical Association for the Schneller Schools (EVS) not only invited a well-known theologian to its annual general meeting but also a friend of the Schneller schools. The Lutheran pastor from Bethlehem talked about his grandfathers who both grew up at the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem. In addition, the EVS took its leave of Rev Andreas Maurer who has been the General Manager of the EVS for many years.

The contribution of Schneller to the development of Palestine is often underestimated.” With this sentence, Mitri Raheb, Pastor at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, started his speech at the annual general meeting of the EVS which took place in Tübingen on 23 October and was attended by more than 80 friends of the Schneller schools. “The Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem played a vital role in Palestine in the 19th and 20th centuries, both economically and socially, by educating and training orphans and blind children to become craftsmen and craftswomen,” said Raheb. “Schneller trained craftsmen at a time when craftsmen were sorely needed.” Up to 1939, more than 3000 master craftsmen had been trained at the Syrian Orphanage. Schneller also taught his pupils to have a strong Christian identity and a feeling of responsibility for society. In Palestinian churches and in education, many leading persons had a Schneller background. “Schneller had the knack of backing, training and developing people with technical and managerial skills. Unfortunately, you don’t find people like him any more,” said Raheb who had also held the sermon during the workshop service at the Stiftskirche (Collegiate Church) in Tübingen that morning. Today, there are no institutions like this with such a well-conceived educational system, he said.

According to Raheb, one of the principles of this success was the claim by the founding father, Johann Ludwig Schneller, and his successors to take the time once a week to talk to each pupil personally. “That was like coaching,” said Raheb. In his function as pastor in Bethlehem, he stumbles “almost every week” upon new stories about former pupils of the Syrian Orphanage who became great personalities. “There is a real need to do more research into this.”

Hartmut Brenner leaves the Executive Board

After the speech given by Mitri Raheb, EVS first took its leave of Hartmut Brenner from the Executive Board. “It is as if an era was drawing to a close,” said Reverend Klaus Schmid, EVS Chairman. There were very few people who had links to Schneller for so long. From 1968 to 1979, Brenner had worked as director of the Theodor Schneller School (TSS) in Amman, and from 1983 to 1986 he had headed the Johann Ludwig Schneller School (JLSS) in Lebanon. “That was in the middle of the Lebanese civil war, and at that time it was simply a matter of survival for the work of the JLSS,” said Schmid who thanked Hartmut Brenner for his many years of work on the EVS Executive Board.

Taking leave of Rev Andreas Maurer

The EVS also took leave of Reverend Andreas Maurer who has been General Manager for many years and whose contract could not be extended for reasons of employment law. “It would fill a whole book if I was to relate everything that Andreas Maurer has done for the EVS in the past twelve years,” said Klaus Schmid. Maurer had put all his body and soul into the work of the schools and was always more than a mere visitor to the two schools. Like “a living bridge” he had worked for understanding between the EVS and the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) and between the Middle East and the West. “He was able to motivate many co-workers for the work of the Schneller schools in the EMS Secretariat and member churches,” said Schmid who also paid tribute to Maurer’s merits in PR work. “We are deeply indebted to him for introducing Schneller wine and other products made by the Schneller schools.” Originally, it was also Andreas Maurer who came up with the idea to set up a foundation.
On behalf of the EMS, Secretary-General Bernhard Dinkelaker expressed his thanks for Maurer’s commitment and his work at the EMS Middle East Liaison Desk. “Andreas Maurer played a key role in bringing the treasure of experience from our partner churches in the Middle East into the world-wide EMS Fellowship,” stressed Dinkelaker and also praised Maurer’s passionate commitment to the Protestant Commission on the Middle East (EMOK), the Study in the Middle East (SiMO), the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the Fellowship of Middle Eastern Evangelical Churches (FMEEC).

Martin Schneller, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace, mentioned that Maurer’s career occurred just at a time of political and social upheavals in the Middle East. “Now what is important for the future of the schools are competence and continuity,” said Schneller. It was all the more painful when institutional constraints result in having to part from highly competent employees. Maurer had started many initiatives at the schools and had been a great catalyst.

Andreas Maurer thanked everyone for their excellent co-operation. “I felt it an honour to be allowed to participate in shaping the history of the Schneller schools for so many years,” said Maurer, who is changing to the Paulinenpflege (a centre for physically and mentally handicapped children and young people) in Winnenden near Stuttgart as assistant to the managing director starting in the middle of November.

Amendment to the Articles of Association of the EMS

At this year’s annual general meeting, Klaus Schmid reported on the current situation at the two schools. The EVS Chairman also explained what the amendments to the EMS Articles of Association would mean for the Association. From the year 2013, the EVS would have its own budget within the EMS. It would be represented by two votes in the EMS Assembly and by one vote on the Mission Council. “We are in good hands in the EMS Fellowship,” said Schmid.

Reinhold Schaal, treasurer to the Association, reported that the EVS had transferred more than 370,000 Euros to the JLSS over the past year and a good 302,000 Euros to the TSS. In his report, Schaal mentioned that the level of donations in 2010 had dropped, despite increased activities in PR work in connection with the 150th anniversary. “This gave us food for thought,” said Schaal. As a result, solidarity within the fellowship of the Evangelical Mission in Solidarity (EMS) is all the more important for the EVS. For example, children’s church work by the Japanese EMS Kyodan church donated 20,000 Euros to the Schneller schools.

In addition, the annual general meeting appointed Steffen Bilger, CDU member of the German parliament from the electoral district of Ludwigsburg, to the Board of Trustees of the Schneller Foundation – Education for Peace.

Katja Dorothea Buck

In the coming year, the EVS will invite its members to Stuttgart on 11 November.
The Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza and the consequences of the blockage

The Ahli Arab Hospital with its 80 beds is the only Christian hospital in the Gaza Strip. Just as in state hospitals, its patients suffer from the blockade: every day the power is cut for several hours, there are few vital medications, there are no spare parts for medical equipment, and no training opportunities abroad for doctors.

The Arabian Spring has not really opened the borders to Gaza, neither on the Egyptian side where about 250 people are permitted to exit every day, nor on the Israeli side. “We have just had to suffer the shock that a plastic surgeon, who had flown in from Australia to carry out operations at the hospital for several weeks, was not granted an entry permit,” reports Suhaila Tarazi, Director of the Ahli Arab Hospital. 300 patients are urgently waiting for the professor. During his last visit, he had performed the first operations on some of them. However, plastic surgery often requires several follow-up operations. Israel has even refused entry to the Gaza Strip three times to Suheil Dawani, Bishop of the Anglican diocese of Jerusalem, one of the sponsors of the Ahli Arab Hospital, when he wanted to visit the hospital.

Chief medical officer Dr Maher Ayad explained there was an increasing number of cancer patients who needed treatment. The women’s ward mainly contained female patients with thyroid and breast cancer. 800 women were examined for breast cancer last year. A fifth of them required further treatment. This year, some 2400 women are to be examined.

The majority of patients and 90 percent of employees are Muslims. The Director reports about the high level of esteem which the Hamas leadership in Gaza holds for Ahli Arab. There is no intervention in the affairs of the hospital. “The occupation is the cause of our suffering,” says the Director. “Hamas is a political party which has a different opinion from the government of the West Bank. This means more suffering for us."

According to information provided by the Middle East Church Council (MECC), 1350 Christians, mainly old people and children, still live in Gaza. Many left the country to seek work abroad. Unemployment in Gaza is 42 percent. In many districts of the town, the level of malnutrition lies at about 12 percent. “Poverty is on the increase. It is difficult for us to turn patients away,” says Tarazi who had to conclude the budget in 2010 with a deficit. “Without donations and support from the churches, we could not keep the hospital running."

The 1.6 million inhabitants in the Gaza Strip have been confined for six years. Half of them are children and young people. According to information issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza, the fact that they are cut off and the lack of economic prospects for the people is leading to an increase in psychic illness, violence in families and more and more divorces. The three week long bombardment of Gaza by the Israelis at Christmas in 2008 left more than 1400 dead and is nourishing fears of worse things to come. The political situation is instable. The Israeli government has threatened the Palestinian government as a result of their UN application for recognition of the State of Palestine.

“We don’t know how we should react as a hospital if and when the next Israeli strike comes,” says Maher Ayad, chief medical officer. It is an enormous challenge to prepare for such an event and still master everyday life at the same time. Although the supply of fuel is better than it was three years ago. But the fuel supplied through the Egyptian tunnel is not good enough for the hospital generator. For this reason, Ahli Arab must continue to obtain diesel from Israel and this is only available at irregular intervals. It was particularly bad this summer. There were power cuts for eight to ten hours a day. Water was in low supply. There is a lack of medicine as before. Spare parts and medical equipment are hard to get. “We cannot import an X-ray machine,” says Tarazi. “And the diocese and the Red Cross would have to work for six months to import a boiler.” Another hurdle is exit permits for ill people who can no longer be treated in Gaza and require radiation treatment, for example. “We wish the border was open,” says Tarazi, who requested us to include the Ahli Arab Hospital in our intercessory prayers.

Wiltrud Rösch-Metzler
“RELIGION IS SOMETHING BETWEEN ME AND GOD”

The Lebanese authoress Emily Nasrallah talks about her childhood

Emily Nasrallah is one of the best known female writers from Lebanon. Her great novels deal with real life as she lived it. Whether she writes about village traditions, about the yearnings of young girls who feel trapped in the village or about the turmoils of those who want to emigrate abroad, the story is always about her own roots. Emily Nasrallah turned 80 this year.

Her parents’ house where she grew up still stands in Kfeir. The village is situated in the south of Lebanon at the foot of Mount Hermon. Kfeir means “village of olives” and this has been the main livelihood of the inhabitants up to the present day. “Everything you find in my books later started in this house,” relates the 80 year old. “Everything refers back to this place. Our house stood next to the church and every evening the priest came by and chatted with my father.” She grew up in a simple religious atmosphere. “The Bible was the first book I ever held in my hands,” says Emily Nasrallah.

Emily Nasrallah was the eldest of six children. When she was born, her father let off some shots of joy – a tradition that was usually reserved for the birth of a boy. Her mother was Greek Orthodox, her father was a Maronite and the church next to her parents’ house was Greek Catholic. In this way she became acquainted with various traditions. Emily Nasrallah was primarily influenced by her grandmother on her mother’s side who could neither read nor write. “I grew up in her faith. She was deeply religious and gave everyone what they needed.” Every evening, her grandmother prayed with her grandchildren. And when the third daughter in a row was born to their neighbours and the father simply threw her out of the window, the grandmother took her in.

In “Septembervögel” (September birds), the first-person narrator Muna describes life in the village, with all the routine agricultural and household duties, church services, weddings and funerals. It represents the author’s world as a child. At that time, women still sat in church behind a curtain made of branches so that they could see the priest but remained unseen by the rest of the congregation. Relationships and looks between unmarried women and men were closely monitored. Muna in the novel put her hands over her ears when she heard a love song in the twilight because the priest had told her: “Man is a sinful creature and love is a deadly sin.” She also relates about demons and evil spirits which were driven away by the villagers with incense and prayers.

Russian missionaries opened the first primary school in Kfeir before the first world war. Girls were allowed to go to school when they were six. Five-year-old Emily often sat outside the window of the school and repeated everything she heard. In the classroom, a teacher used to teach three classes. Finally, her mother asked whether the small girl could also go into the classroom. The teacher accepted. Later two of her uncles helped Emily to study when she was sixteen. She was the first girl in her village to study in Beirut.

Like Muna in the novel, who had even fewer supporters, Emily Nasrallah felt an obligation towards her parents and the village. On no account did she want to be a disgrace. After she graduated from the Protestant University in Shoueifat, she studied education at the American University in Beirut. On the side, she taught and began work at a magazine. Since she was a Maronite on her father’s side, she required a certificate to marry an Orthodox Christian, despite the fact that she had grown up in this faith. The authoress smiles when she talks about this. “In the meantime there is an agreement in cases like these. For me, religion is something between me and God,” she says. And this is what I passed on to my own children. “I never forced them to go to church. But they live out their Christianity. That’s what I taught them.”

Martina Waiblinger

Emily Nasrallah’s novels provide a vivid insight into life in a Lebanese village and describe the social changes that took place during the civil war (1975 to 1990). The main themes are the attempts at emancipation by young women and the consequences of many young men migrating abroad. Emily Nasrallah has also written many children’s books. Four of her books have been translated into German.

Septembervögel (September birds)
Lenos Verlag, 1988

“Flug gegen die Zeit” (Flight against time).
Lenos Verlag, 1991

Das Pfand (The pledge)
Lenos Verlag, 1996

Kater Ziku lebt gefährlich (A Cat’s Diary)
Nagel & Kimche, 1996
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And here is another speciality: as the book is written in the Austrian dialect of German, a very helpful glossary is included in the appendix for all those who, for example, do not know what “Paradeiser” are (Paradise, originally from the Croatian word for tomato, “rajčica” meaning “from paradise”). All in all, a wonderful present for people with a wide horizon.

Andreas Maurer