

Laudatio zum Mount Zion Award 2011



Der Jordan... (Bild vergrößern)

Weitere Informationen zum MZA 2011



Laudatio on the Occasion of the Mt Zion Award, 30/10/2011

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

We wish you a warm welcome today to Dormition Abbey for the conferral of the Mt. Zion Award. As we recall the guiding inspiration of Wilhelm Salberg, initiator of this prestigious prize, we thank the members of the Mount Zion Foundation based at the Institute for Jewish-Christian Relations at the University of Lucerne, Switzerland, for their on-going work in helping to realize his ecumenical and inter-religious vision.

It is our immense pleasure today to award the Mt. Zion Prize to the Directors of Friends of the Earth Middle East, namely, to Mr. Munqeth Mehyar, (Chairperson and Jordanian Director), Mr. Nader Khateeb (Palestinian Director) and Mr. Gidon Bromberg (Israeli Director). Welcome above all to you today. We offer you our deepest congratulations not only on receiving this prize but still more on account of the excellent work you do in environmental protection and in raising public awareness of its importance, especially in relation to the burning question of water, surely one of the most significant issues in this region.

According to the accepted rules of classical rhetoric the purpose of a laudatio is to heap praise on its recipient for his or her achievements. Today, however, the recipient of the Mt. Zion Award is not one only but three! Yet I am certain that each one of you would remind us that with and behind you, an entire organization is working to bring about a vision of a world where the environment is cherished and protected, and its sustainability guaranteed.

Regarding the importance of the Jordan River valley, it is hardly possible to exaggerate. The river's symbolic significance is vast, both within the three great monotheistic faiths and within the wider understanding even of an increasingly secularized western world.

Whether we think of it within the context of the Hebrew Scriptures, where it is forever connected with the figures of Moses, Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, or whether we meet it in the Christian Scriptures as the place of the ministry of St. John the Forerunner and the baptism of Jesus; whether we examine its importance in Islamic tradition where it is associated with the immediate followers of the Prophet, or whether we remember that its waters were, and still are, regularly brought to Europe to be used in the baptism of royal children; whether we encounter its widespread use as a symbol in world culture, where “crossing the Jordan” for example functions as a powerful metaphor of transition, or the fact that as a name one can meet it in places as far away from Israel as Northern Ireland – the symbolic significance of this river is very evident.

But as anyone who looks at the disturbing evidence produced by Friends of the Earth Middle East will recognize, symbolism, however beautiful, is simply not enough. It is not enough because the real Jordan, the actual Jordan, is seriously ill, is in fact in grave danger of death! Symbolism has little practical value if the real river itself is relentlessly forced into becoming nothing but a dried up channel, an ugly conduit for the passage of untreated sewage, rubbish and chemical waste, or worst of all, a so-called “resource” which human beings can exploit so ruthlessly that the delicate ecosystems on which the balance of life on the planet depends – both in the micro and macro spheres – are threatened and destroyed.

The Creator God whom we worship in our respective faith traditions is the God who made the heavens. But as Jews and Christian sing in Psalm 115, and as Moslems also believe, he confided the earth to the children of men for them to work and develop, but also to cherish and protect. He must indeed be weeping bitter tears as he observes how thoughtlessly his children rape and pillage his creation, this wonderful earth, which he fashioned in wisdom as a glittering manifestation of his own divine beauty, but which we too often reduce to dust and ashes with our love of money, fear of peace and incapacity to dream dreams and see visions of the future and a world renewed.

From the dawn of creation in this region, the Jordan has been a source of living water; in recent years it has, sadly, become a border and a symbol of division; but in your work we see with hope that even a border may become a focus of unity as the communities whose lives depend on its waters work together to help them flow more freely in abundant and life-fostering fullness.

Dear **Friends of the Earth Middle East**, like the founder of the Mt. Zion Award, you do indeed have the courage and imagination to dream dreams and see such visions. You have committed much work, much energy, much passion to the redemption of the Jordan River Valley and to its protection and renewal. Today, in the name of all for whom this river desperately needs to be not merely a beautiful symbol from the past but a living reality in the present giving life to many, we have come to praise you and to acknowledge your splendid achievement.

So then let us praise you!

- We praise you for issuing us with a wake-up call, the call that this vital part of God's creation, of God's Holy Land, is seriously under threat: and we thank you for inviting us to pay attention.
- We praise you for the difficult, demanding and unromantic day-to-day labor you undertake to heighten public consciousness about this matter, and to find practical solutions for its resolution.
- We praise you for your commitment to peace in this troubled region, a peace which, as we learned in Northern Ireland, never comes about without real governmental action in the social, economic and political spheres to better the lot of people and to improve their daily living conditions; but which also grows from grass-roots projects and local initiative such as you encourage in your various programs.
- We praise you for your courageous trans-national capacity to think outside the crippling egoisms of nationalism, sectarianism and party prejudice, and for having the imagination to reach out across boundaries and borders and to embrace one another, rejoicing in the differences of others.
- We praise you for reminding us that infinitely more important than all our man-made divisions is our God-given common humanity, a heritage in which we are already one. This common humanity you foster and nurture through your work in local communities, especially among the young.
- And we praise and thank you, finally, because with genuine authenticity you are that which you claim to be: friends of the earth! To be a true friend of the earth is to be a true friend also of the One Creator God, whose mercy called it into being, whose love sustains it and whose divine wisdom impels us to embrace it with compassion, to care for it and heal it, instead of wounding and exploiting it so mercilessly.

Dear Friends of the Earth Middle East:

In the presence of this living and life-giving Creator God, the ever-abundant source of life;

With grateful acknowledgement of your splendid achievement in the protection and renewal of creation;

And in thanksgiving for your work for peace, justice, reconciliation and the improvement of the living conditions of all whose lives revolve around the Jordan, we congratulate you on your reception of the Mt. Zion Award and we offer you today our laudatio of praise and thanksgiving.

May the vision of Lot recorded in Genesis 13, 10, be seen once more in our day and may we see it soon: like him, may we look about the plain of Jordan and see that it is indeed well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord, an earthly foretaste of the coming paradise, a vision of a world renewed.