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Pfeiffer, Baldur Edmund (1937–2018)

JOHANNES HARTLAPP, AND STEFAN HÖSCHELE

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Stefan Höschele, Ph.D. habil. (Charles University, Prague) served in Algeria from 1993 to 1994 and Tanzania from 1997 to 2003. Subsequently, he taught systematic theology and Adventist studies at Friedensau Adventist University in Germany. His publications include *Christian Remnant–African Folk Church: Seventh-Day Adventism in Tanzania, 1903-1980* (Brill, 2007), and *Interchurch and Interfaith Relations: Seventh-day Adventist Documents* (Peter Lang, 2010).

Baldur Pfeiffer was both an important Adventist mission historian – one of the first to explore Adventist missionary

impulses coming from Europe – and a dedicated humanitarian. He contributed both to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and to the landscape of education and humanitarian work internationally by building up institutions and organizations such as Middle East College, Theologische Hochschule Friedensau, the European Adventist Archives, and Support Africa.

Early Years and Education

Baldur Pfeiffer was born in Würzburg, Germany, on October 2, 1937.¹ His father died during World War II in 1943, and his mother lost all her belongings in the bombings of 1945. After that he lived at various places – in the Black Forest, where his mother's family came from, and in the Taunus area, where his paternal grandparents lived. Baldur's maternal grandparents, Wilhelm and Maria Faas, had become Adventists after being Methodists for some time, so his mother was also an Adventist, and he grew up as part of the Church community.

He experienced his years of youth in the challenging but dynamic years after World War II. After an apprenticeship as a gardener from 1952 to 1955, he completed his secondary education and studied theology at Seminar Marienhöhe, Darmstadt, from 1955 to 1958. When he moved to Newbold College, he learned English and took history and religion classes from 1958 to 1959. His teacher, George Keough, who had lived in Egypt for many years, impressed him so much that he decided to move to the Middle East himself. Thus, from 1959 to 1961, he studied theology and history at Middle East College in Beirut, Lebanon, and graduated with a Bachelor's degree there – quite an unusual academic path at the time, which indicates his interest for both education and foreign cultures.

Marriage, Further Studies, and Early Teaching Ministry in Lebanon

Pfeiffer married Gerlinde née Fischer, from Gießen, in 1962, and in the same year, they went to Andrews University where he completed a Master's in history. Towards the end of their stay there, their daughter Sabine was born; in 1967, daughter Beate followed. After returning to Germany in 1964, Pfeiffer enrolled in the University of Mainz for doctoral studies in history, which he finished in 1971.² Three years later, the young family went to his alma mater, Middle East College, Beirut, where Pfeiffer taught history for 11 years. At the same time, he completed another Master's at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, with the aim of better understanding the cultural and religious diversity of the Middle East.³ At the time, Middle East College belonged to the Afro-Mideast Division;⁴ therefore, students from various parts of East Africa were also trained at the institution. More than 30 nations were at times represented at the college.

During these years, the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990) broke out; the college campus was located right between the war parties, and for years, bullets and missiles flew right over the area. Apart from the dangers and economic hardship brought by the war, Pfeiffer and the other college employees had to take care of about 60 African students who could not return to their countries in this situation.⁵

Back to Germany

In 1978, the family returned to Germany. Pfeiffer first worked in Hamburg as a pastor, then, from 1980 onward, as a lecturer at the Marienhöhe seminary, Darmstadt, with a focus on Adventist history and mission history. At the same time, he established and expanded the Archives of European Adventist History⁶ (which would then move to Friedensau in the 1990s). In this capacity, he published several books and started an academic series for Adventist history. Through his publications, he became one of the first Adventist mission historians.

In the same period, he served the South German Union as well as the German section of the IADRL/AIDLR (International Association for the Defense of Religious Liberty) in the field of religious liberty.⁷ In this context, he became the editor of the German version of the journal *Conscience and Liberty (Gewissen und Freiheit)* and achieved the recognition of a consultative status for the AIDLR at the Council of Europe.⁸ During the later years of the Lebanese Civil War, Pfeiffer had the opportunity to advise President Amin Gemayel on matters of religious liberty and the role of religions in creating peace.⁹

When Friedensau Theological Seminary was recognized by the short-lived democratic GDR government of 1990, in that year, Pfeiffer was called as the rector (college president) to lead the institution into a new phase of history. With his visionary spirit, international experience, and exposure to situations of acute hardship, he was well prepared for this task. After moving to Friedensau in 1991, he led out in building up the institution into a multifaceted college with several programs of study: theology, social work, church music, music therapy, and combinations of these.

Later Years

In 1996, he stepped down as rector but continued to teach at the institution and then mainly focused on developing an association to support African universities – *Support Africa*. This charity, which also birthed the *Support Africa Foundation* a few years later, established a network to support ambitious projects of developing universities in several African countries, both Adventist and non-Adventist institutions. His major interests were agriculture and the health sciences, including medicine; *Support Africa* participated in the establishment of several programs of nursing and medicine. For a number of years, the *Support Africa Foundation* also awarded prizes to researchers in several scientific lines. He served these organizations far beyond his retirement, until *Support Africa* was legally transferred to

ADRA Germany shortly before his sudden death on October 16, 2018.

Beyond these international activities, Pfeiffer also supported the “Haus Hohensolms Foundation,” an institution for children and youth with mental and multiple disabilities, by serving as executive committee chairman.¹⁰

In 2003, the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya (a Seventh-day Adventist institution) honored him with an honorary doctorate. In 2007, a *Festschrift* was published in his honor.¹¹

Contributions

Baldur Pfeiffer was both an important Adventist mission historian and a dedicated humanitarian. With his extraordinary personality, extremely self-disciplined work ethic and visionary spirit, a focus on higher learning that built its ideas of Adventist education on the pedagogical philosophy of Ellen White, and his will to build up institutions and organizations such as Middle East College, Theologische Hochschule Friedensau, the European Adventist Archives, and Support Africa, he contributed both to the Seventh-day Adventist denomination and to the landscape of education and humanitarian work internationally.

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NOTES

1. Partly based on Johannes Hartlapp, "Nachruf für Prof. Dr. phil. Dr. h.c. Baldur Edmund Pfeiffer (1937–2018)," *adventisten heute* (January 2019): 26. Further information from Gerlinde Pfeiffer, "Baldur Edmund Pfeiffer: Ein biographischer Abriss," in *Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Gerechtigkeit: Festschrift für Baldur Pfeiffer*, ed. Johannes Hartlapp and Stefan Höschele (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2007), 213–228.?
2. His dissertation was entitled, "Germany and the American Civil War" ("Deutschland und der amerikanische Bürgerkrieg, 1861–1865," Dr. Phil. diss., University of Mainz, 1971).?
3. He graduated in 1978; his Master's thesis was later published: Baldur E. Pfeiffer, *The European Seventh-day Adventist Mission in the Middle East 1879–1939*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 23, Theologie, 161 (Frankfurt a. M.: Lang, 1981).?
4. Cf. Sven Hagen Jensen, "Afro-Mideast Division (1970-1981)," *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, accessed November 16, 2021, <https://encyclopedia.adventist.org/article?id=6HMH.>?
5. They were ultimately able to flee in the dead of night when college operations had completely broken down and the institution had to be closed.?
6. Daniel Heinz, "Zukunft braucht Herkunft. Das Historische Archiv der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Europa," in *Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Gerechtigkeit: Festschrift für Baldur Pfeiffer*, ed. Johannes Hartlapp and Stefan Höschele (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2007), 41–50.?
7. Technically, he was an assistant to the department directors (mainly Bruno Liske, who was also the union secretary from 1983 onwards), from 1982 to 1990 (see the respective *Yearbooks*). In fact, he ran the religious liberty affairs of the union and largely also of the denomination in the Federal Republic of Germany at large.?
- 8.

Gerlinde Pfeiffer, "Baldur Edmund Pfeiffer," 223–224.?

9. One product of this relationship was the article by Amine Gemayel, "Zukunftsperspektiven für den Libanon," *Gewissen und Freiheit* 28 (1987): 92–93.?
10. <https://www.haus-hohensolms.de/IVerein/Verein.html>, accessed October 15, 2021.?
11. Johannes Hartlapp and Stefan Höschele, eds., *Geschichte, Gesellschaft, Gerechtigkeit: Festschrift für Baldur Pfeiffer* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2007).?
12. Further items are found in Stefan Höschele, "Bibliographie Baldur Edmund Pfeiffer," in *ibid.*, 209–211.?

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