

The Image of Christians and the 'Other' in Educational Curricula in the Arab World

National perspectives from the Middle East

Gefinor Rotana Hotel, Beirut, Lebanon

March 4. -5., 2016

Table of content

Background and introduction to the conference

p. 3

The Egyptian Case: *“Struggle of Christians with Citizenship and Radicalism in the Egyptian System of Education”* – by Dr. Kamal Mugheeth

p. 5

The Iraqi Case: *“Portrayal of Christians and the ‘Other’ in Curricula and Education System”*
– by Dr. Yehia Al Kubaisi

p. 12

The Jordanian Case: *“Identity and Portrayal of Arab Christians in Jordanian Curricula: Reality and Ambitions”* – by Basel Saliba

p. 16

The Lebanese Case: *“Portrayal of Christians and the ‘Other’ in Curricula and Education System”*
– by Father Dr. George Massouh

p. 37

The Palestinian Case: *“Portrayal of Arab Christians, and the ‘Other’ in the Curricula”*
– by Father Dr. Peter Hanna Madros

p. 40

Background and introduction to the conference

There seem to be a consensus that educational curricula for students in the primary and secondary grades in several Arab countries have failed to establish a culture of tolerance and pluralism, dialogue, co-existence and mutual respect. It is generally believed, that these curricula help increase extremism among the younger generations, especially when we consider that teaching and learning methods used are mostly seen as indoctrinating of nature, which does not help in building the students critical approach, but rather makes the student an easy target for extremist and terrorist groups.

Curricula in countries where there are Christians and other ethnic and religious minorities (e.g. Kurds, Yazidis, etc.) among its population (Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria), often tend to neglect the role and importance of minorities in developing the civilization of these countries and their culture, and do not sufficiently highlight the contribution of these groups in the political, economic, cultural and social life in these countries and communities.

This important challenge was the focus of the conference “The Image of Christians and the ‘Other’ in Educational Curricula in Arab World”, which was organized by Al Quds Center for Political Studies¹ and Danmission² on the 4th and 5th of March 2016 at the Rotana Gefinor Hotel in Beirut, Lebanon. The conference was financed by the Danish Arab Partnership Programme (DAPP).

Gathered in the heart of Lebanon over two days, 70 regional and international experts discussed how the educational curricula in the Arab States promote or discourage mutual understanding and coexistence among the different religious groups. The conference is the fruit of the extensive experience that the two organizing entities have in the field of human rights, interreligious dialogue and previous initiatives that were organized over the years. The conference implemented one of the recommendations enshrined in the “Amman Declaration: Roadmap for a better Future for Christians in Arab Countries” which was prepared following a series of consultations carried out in 2013-2014 with a variety of regional stakeholders.

The participants of the Beirut conference included representatives from six regional countries, namely Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon. They included clergymen, members of parliament, human rights activists, academia, journalists and professionals in the education sector. Experts from Denmark also

¹ <http://www.alqudscenter.org/home/english/>

² <http://www.danmission.com>

participated in the conference to stimulate cross-learning and to present the lessons learnt from the successful Danish experience.

The conference was structured around four main sessions to bring out the different aspects and nuances of this theme. The discussions focused in the following main topics:

- The Image of Christians and "the Other" in School Curricula and Educational Processes
- Identity and religion in the educational process
- Reviewing and Reforming the Legislative Framework
- The Danish experience: integrating the different components of the society into school curricula

The talks were characterized by a high-level of engagement of all participants which sought on the one side to bring the experience from their respective countries and, on the other side, to propose practical recommendations for a way forward.

This document collects five research papers which were developed prior to the conference by key experts and contributors to the conference. The research papers represent the case of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine and were presented during the conference.

The Egyptian Case: Struggle of Christians with Citizenship and Radicalism in the Egyptian System of Education³

Dr. Kamal Mugheeth

Scholar

The National Centre for Educational Research and Development (NCERD)

Modern school

Europe's modern era witnessed a fundamental change, including the rise of nationalism and the bourgeoisie, paving the way for capitalism, which was a prelude to uprooting the feudal mode of production, obtaining raw materials, opening new markets, and empowering individuals. In order to create this change, feudalism, principalities, fiefs, and small duchies had to be dismantled. States with nationalist systems and cultures were established, and individuals became citizens loyal to the nation as a whole.

Many factors supported the concepts of modernism and citizenship. Positions which individuals occupy in society were determined by relations of production; not by religion, race, or culture. Human, liberal, and secular philosophies made that fundamental change possible, halting the interference of church and religious leaders with people's lives.

The modern school played a key role in establishing and backing citizenship, and modernism values. As long as children hail from families with diverse ideologies, values, and financial conditions, those kids need to receive education under unified nationalist curricula supported by qualified teachers equipped to work in line with a single education system. And because such factors are prerequisites for instituting citizenship⁴, the concepts of compulsory and free education as well as criminalisation of parents who do not send their children to school, were born.

At school, students learn about their national history, as well as sacrifices made by their parents and grandparents to build civilisations, fight injustice and repression, and demand rights. Students start to form and create ideas about national values as they learn about prominent leaders and figures in history, the geography and borders of their nation, and Arabic language, grammar, terminology pertinent to their nation, and writings of founding fathers.

³ A paper presented at the regional conference, "Portrayal of Christians and the 'Other' in the Curricula of Regional Countries", organised in Beirut by Al Quds Centre for Political Studies, and Danmission on March 4-5, 2016.

⁴ Awad L. *History of Modern Egyptian Thought*. Cairo. General Egyptian Book Organisation. 1978. Part 1. P. 44.

Eventually, sectarian, familial, and tribal affiliations become secondary⁵, replaced by loyalty to nation. Gradually, sectarian, religious, and tribal divisions disappear, substituted by divisions based on ideology (rightists, leftists, centrists), culture (conservatives, liberals), and economic factors (capitalists, businesspeople, middle class). Also, political formations, such as parties, unions, associations, and non-governmental organisations, emerge, along with thinkers, nationalist philosophers, national arts, including music and poetry, and sports.

Secularism had a major role in defining the relation between religion and the education establishment. It sought to create educational institutions where religion is not taught to students, replacing it with values and ethics, and ensuring that religious principles do not contradict with social values and laws.

This how countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, and Spain, built and created democracy, citizenship, and modernism⁶. Modernism in these countries is constantly being enhanced due to secular and liberal education systems and schools.

In Egypt, however, the relation between education and modernism took a different path. As the decaying Ottoman Empire headed towards destruction, Muhammad Ali of Egypt (1769-1849) expanded his realm, without discriminating between his Muslim, Christian, French, Italian, Circassian, Turkish, or Kurdish aids. But the military characteristics of his plans⁷ led to an absence of intellectual, cultural and political principles necessary for building modern institutions. Nevertheless, Muhammad Ali established well-equipped modern schools in line with scientific and national values, without discriminating between students, and dispatched “educational missions” to Europe, mainly France, that significantly enhanced modernism in Egypt.⁸

Educational mission students included Mahmud Pasha Falaki, Ali Pasha Mubarak, Rifa'a Tahtawi, and Isma'il Pasha, Muhammad Ali's grandson who was proclaimed Khedive of Egypt. Isma'il Pasha (1830-1895) supported modernism and launched political and legal reforms, establishing the country's first legislative assembly in 1866⁹, including many Copts. In 1875, he created a system of mixed courts, by which Europeans were tried by judges from their own states. Separating the ministry of schools (education) from the ministry of war (defence), Isma'il Pasha established the first school for girls in 1873, teaching women's studies, literature, language, history, and other subjects to students. The eldest son of Isma'il Pasha, Muhammed Tewfik Pasha (1852-1892), succeeded his father. In 1882, the United Kingdom invaded Egypt -- a factor that united Egyptian Muslims and Christians in resisting the occupation.

⁵ Awad L. *History of Modern Egyptian Thought*. Cairo. General Egyptian Book Organisation. 1978. Part 1. P. 65.

⁶ Awad L. *History of Modern Egyptian Thought*. Cairo. General Egyptian Book Organisation. 1978. Part 1. P. 67.

⁷ Khalafallah M. *History of the Formation of National Values*. Beirut. Dar Al Taliah. 2000. P. 281

⁸ Khalafallah M. *History of the Formation of National Values*. Beirut. Dar Al Taliah. 2000. P. 45

⁹ Gharib H. *Towards a Healthy Relation Between Arabism and Islam*. Beirut. Dar Al Taliah. 2000. P. 281

Citizenship values were enhanced with calls for independence from the Ottomans led by Egyptian intellectual and anti-colonial activist Aḥmad Luṭfi Sayyid Pasha, who insisted that “Egypt is for the Egyptians”.¹⁰

Calls for empowerment of women increased after Qasim Amin, Egyptian jurist, Islamic modernist, and one of the founders of the Egyptian national movement, published his books, “Liberation of Women” and “The New Woman”. The 1908 establishment of Cairo University, known as the Egyptian University until 1940, was a turning point in the history of Egypt’s nationalism and modernism movement as well culture.

Modernism values became stronger after the countrywide revolution of 1919, against the British occupation of Egypt and Sudan. Although the 1923 Constitution said Islam is the religion of Egypt, the body of fundamental principles helped establish a modern state and diversify its economic, social, and political life.

Ruling political parties were aware that modernism and citizenship were key to the government of the county as well as political enlightenment¹¹. Schools and universities produced intellectual liberals, who contributed to the creation of a culture interacting with society and cultural challenges, including citizenship.

Egyptian revolution of 1952

With this 23 July Revolution, liberal culture, which was the frame of reference for education, gradually decayed. The revolution was unjustifiably aggressive towards political parties and politicians, accusing them of serving colonialism and the palace. Disregarding and discrediting pre-revolution efforts to establish the constitution and democracy as well as the struggle against occupation, the revolution sought to protect its popularity, ruling for years without the constitution or parliament.

The revolution was also indiscriminately aggressive towards foreigners and the Egyptian Jewish community, regardless whether its memebbers served Zionism or disapproved the creation of Israel, forcing them to emigrate to Europe, the US, and Latin America. In the field of education, four ministers headed the education ministry in two year¹²: Saad Labban, Ismael Qabbani, Abbas Ammar, and Mohammad Awad. In a period of political uncertainty, the military rulers sought to solidify their authority, appointing in 1954, Kamal El-Din Hussein, a member of the Egyptian Free Officers, as minister of education. Serving until 1961¹³, Hussein led the education system in line with military doctrine, under which educational institutions promoted ideological polarisation and taught student one-party principles and values, instead of ideological and political pluralism.

¹⁰ Awad L. *History of Modern Egyptian Thought*. Cairo. General Egyptian Book Organisation. 1978. Part 1. P. 156.

¹¹ Feki M. *Revival of Arab Nationalist Thought*. Cairo. Dar El Shorouk. 1993. P. 34.

¹² NCERD. *160 Years of Education in Egypt: Education Ministers and their Achievements (1836-2002)*. Cairo. P. 275.

¹³ NCERD. *160 Years of Education in Egypt: Education Ministers and their Achievements (1836-2002)*. Cairo. P. 295.

Starting the scholastic year 1957-1958, military education was included in the secondary education curricula, supervised by a special committee. Religious education became a basic subject for all students, as the education ministry adopted an Islamic approach, with a new Quran memorisation curriculum.

The one-party rule gradually established a religious culture at the expense of tolerance, pluralism, shared values, solidifying political grip, and exploiting Arab nationalism as a cultural cover. Invoking past glories, the military rulers imposed restrictions on foreign educational institutions, and developed Al Azhar system of education, promoting and encouraging education with religious approach.

Al Azhar system of education

It runs in parallel with the public educational system, consisting of six years of primary stage, a three-year preparatory stage and finally three years of secondary stage. Graduates of Al Azhar secondary schools are eligible to continue their studies at the Al Azhar University.

In 1961, the government issued law number 103, establishing Al Azhar as a university with a wide range of secular faculties, such as business, economics, science, pharmacy, medicine, engineering and agriculture. Before that date, Al Azhar was classified variously as madrasa, centre of higher learning and, since the 19th century, religious university.

Under the law, the government sought to link Al Azhar and public educational systems, enabling student to switch between courses and programmes.

Today, nearly two million female and male students receive education at Al Azhar's 8,000 teaching institutes and 150 colleges.

Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak

Following the death of Gamal Abdel Nasser three years after the 1967 Six-Day War, and in absence of intellectual and cultural movements, the one-party system continued with Anwar Sadat (1918-1981), another member of the Egyptian Free Officers, succeeding Nasser as president.

Sadat announced his Corrective Revolution, purging the government, political and security establishments of the most ardent Nasserists. Seeking reconciliation with religious rightists in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world, Sadat empowered the Muslim Brotherhood, releasing from prison activists and leaders of radical Islamist groups jailed under Nasser.

Under Sadat, and in the absence of a cultural policy to confront a rise of Islamism, Islamist figures returned from exile in the Gulf to Egypt, while the media acted as a platform for Islamist symbols such as Islamic cleric, Sheikh Mohamed Mutwali Sharawi. While Sadat was unravelling Nasserism and empowering Islamists, violence against Copts rose in 1971 and 1972, as Muslim-Coptic relations

hit rock-bottom. In the aftermath, Sadat initiated a parliamentary investigation, led by Jamal Utayfi, a deputy speaker the House of Representatives. But the late Egyptian president continued to support radical Islamist groups, and ignored Utayfi's probe, which called for measures to combat sectarianism. The extremists targeted national identity and Muslim-Christian bonds, distorting Egypt's traditional culture of tolerance, and encouraging radicalism.

Islamist movements, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood, focused on recruitment of teachers. Hassan Banna, founder of the Brotherhood as well as Sayyid Qutb, a leading member of the group, started their careers as teachers. Realising the key role teachers can play in preaching, the Islamist groups permeated education colleges, recruited students, and invested in the education sector, building schools, with clear Islamist approach.

Religious discrimination in education was established under Sadat, and became increasingly common in many aspects and elements of the education system:

- **Duality in the education system:** As leaders of the 1952 revolution attempted to bridge the gap between the public and Al Azhar systems of education, Al Azhar educational institutions gradually became independent, rejecting the enrolment of public school students in its programmes. Al Azhar developed its own curriculum and system, providing elementary to university education for students who do not mix Copts or females.
- **The education law no. 139 of 1981:** Article 6 stipulates that religious education is a basic subject for all stages of education, and the pass mark is at least 50 percent. "The Ministry of Education organises Quran memorisation contests, and award winners in line with the instructions of the Supreme Council of Education and Students," according to the law. The education ministry disregards the principles of equality and equality of opportunity, which Egypt's modern education system sought to ensure since its establishment under Muhammad Ali. Why would the ministry promote Quran memorisation? Isn't this part of the duties of the awqaf ministry and Al Azhar? Why can't the education ministry support Bible memorisation contests for Christian students? Citizenship should top constitutional principles, regardless of race, religion, and colour.
- **Dominance of religious discourse:** Religious discourse dominated education at the expense of modernism and equality, affecting the role of teachers¹⁴. Teachers travelled to work in the Gulf region, where the culture conditioned on a luxury lifestyle. They returned to Egypt to hold senior education ministry positions and head schools. All attempts to reform and develop the education systems failed due the influence of those teachers, who imposed hijab on female students, discriminated between Christians and Muslims, encouraged veiled women to teach in schools, undermined national symbols, and created a strict religious environment.
- **The hijab-niqab battle:** The Islamists, who started to dominate the education ministry in the late 1970s, sought to impose religious characteristics on the education system, contrary to

¹⁴ Freire P. *Teachers as Cultural Workers*. Boulder, Colorado. Westview Press. 2005. P. 13.

civil and national principles that emphasise citizenship and national identity. Schools filled their libraries with radical religious books, such as the writings of Abul A'la Maududi, Muhammad ibn Abd Al Wahhab, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Qutb, as well as recordings of radical preachers inciting anti-Christian hatred. They held religious contests and ceremonies, where students performed Islamic songs and activities, promoting Islamist discourse. Some schools refused to salute the national flag, saying salutation is for God only. Ahmed Zaki Badr, a former education minister, formed committees to investigate the issue. School theatrical plays centred on Islamic history, while education ministry inspectors forced female teachers to wear hijab. Teachers who did not comply were referred to a disciplinary council. Girls too were forced to wear hijab. This prompted former education minister Hussein Kamel Bahaa El Din to fight a legal battle against compulsory hijab. Courts could not prevent hijab, but granted the education ministry the right to ban females wearing niqab from teaching. The Supreme Administrative Court, however, ruled that teachers have the right to wear niqab because it is a personal matter -- a factor that helped increase the number of teachers wearing niqab. A school principal referred an English language teacher wearing niqab to a disciplinary council because she teaches her students Sahih Al Bukhari instead of language lessons. A philosophy teacher proudly told me that all her students perform night prayers. Asked about how she educate students on Marxism and existentialism, the teacher answered: "I do not teach such corrupt and deluding ideas." As part of dominance of religion over citizenship, Islamists took advantage of Christmas and other Christian celebrations to flex muscle and harass the Copts. Departments of education announce mid-year examinations as Christians celebrate their holidays, promoting Coptic activists to file complaints and address the problem on national television and in newspapers. But all their efforts were in vain.

Hidden curriculum

Hidden curriculum is one of the elements of the education system that impacts students and their future. It is a side effect of an education; lessons, which are learned but not openly intended such as the transmission of norms, values, and beliefs conveyed in the classroom and the social environment. The way radicalism permeated schools turned them into religious institutions, where modernism, critical thinking, innovation and freedom of thought have no place.

Discrimination against Jews

Religious radicalism also affected the Jewish community. Following the 1979 signing of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, opposition columnists and writers claimed that the agreement had secret articles forcing Cairo to omit from the curricula any reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the occupation of Palestine, as well as anti-Jewish content. In recent years, however, textbooks were filled not only with anti-Israel sentiment, but also incitement against Jews and Judaism. Some of the contents can be easily deemed as anti-Semitic. Zionists exploit anti-Semitism to blackmail the world.

Conclusion

The education process and system should achieve the following goals:

1. Create a culture of modernism: Graduates should be well-educated; equipped to deal with the broad sense of culture; believe in democracy, rule of law and constitution, freedom of expressing political and religious views; respect cultural diversity, and differences; and support human rights. Taha Hussein (1889-1973), one of the most influential 20th-century Egyptian writers and intellectuals, and a figurehead for the Egyptian Renaissance and the modernist movement in the Middle East and North Africa, discussed education issues in his 1938 book, "The Future of Culture in Egypt".
2. Belief in science and scientific methods: Graduates should believe in the role of science in advancing humanity, addressing individual and group problems, and solving mysteries of the universe. The absence of scientific methods and dominance of demagoguery over people's lives create superstitions and myths. Many people, glorified by the media, simply attribute natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanos, and tsunamis, as well as poverty problems, and epidemics, to the will of God.
3. Create a three-dimensional citizenship:
 - a. Conscience/emotion: Loyalty to one's homeland, sacrifice, and honouring national history, heritage, and symbols.
 - b. Knowledge: Formation of national knowledge, political systems, work mechanisms, institutions, constitution, laws, political parties, newspapers, and human rights.
 - c. Behaviour: Willingness to exert effort for national causes, such as poverty, illiteracy, pollution, and political engagement.

Such goals indicate the deterioration in the education process and culture of graduates. They also emphasise the strong relation between the existing education system and religious radicalism. This relation can be demonstrated in the fact that a majority of extremists are educated, holding university or college degrees. Illiteracy among radicals is rare as several top leaders of Islamist terrorist groups are graduates of prestigious universities.

The Iraqi Case: Portrayal of Christians and the ‘Other’ in Curricula and Education System¹⁵

Dr. Yehia Al Kubaisi
Scholar
The Iraqi Centre for Strategic Studies

Portrayal of Christians and the ‘other’ in the Iraqi curricula

When Iraq was founded in 1921, King Faisal I of Iraq believed that education is key to producing a well-defined national identity, on which he wrote a letter to his advisers in 1931. In reality, the curricula in Iraq are built on Arabism and Sunnism. Until 2003, the curricula were based on Sunni doctrines, practices, and jurisprudence, without addressing issues about other ideologies. After that year, the political Sunni-Shiite conflict directly influenced the curricula, which remained undeveloped and lacked subjects and topics discussing the “other”. For example, the curricula talk a lot about Saladin, including that he was born in Tikrit, but fail to mention that the Muslim sultan was Kurd. Another example is the negative ways the curricula describe the Crusades, without mentioning that they were Christian.

After 2003, issues became more complicated. The “other” remained absent in the curricula, which lacked a clear vision or philosophy of education. School textbooks contradict each other because committees in charge of drafting textbooks are enmeshed in conflicts and disputes.

As for Christianity and Judaism, in a second-grade textbook, seven-year-old students read the Surah Al Fatihah verse: “The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray.” The textbook says the “favoured” are the Muslims, and those who earned God’s anger are the Jews, while the “astray” are those similar to the Jews.” The textbook does not explain what it means by that, although obviously, it refers to Christians.

In a third-grade textbook, the authors say that all people should be adherent of Islam, and that Moses and Jesus told their followers about the Prophet Muhammad, and asked them to believe in him. Some, the book adds, believed in the Prophet Muhammad, but “others” were disbelievers or infidels. The “others” clearly mean those who remained adherent of Christianity and Judaism.

Things get more complicated in the fourth grade. According to a textbook: “We believe in all prophets; the first was Adam and the last was Muhammad. The final and complete revelation of faith was made through the Prophet Muhammad.” But in the six grade, the narrative is different, saying that “we believe in all prophets without making a distinction between any of them ... we

¹⁵ A paper presented at the regional conference, “Portrayal of Christians and the ‘Other’ in the Curricula of Regional Countries”, organised in Beirut by Al Quds Centre for Political Studies, and Danmission on March 4-5, 2016.

therefore must believe in the divine books sent down by Allah.” Other textbooks, however, clearly say the Torah and Bible were distorted.

National education textbooks, meanwhile, discuss the Iraqi social components and the political conflict, whose strong influence produced a “hybrid” curriculum, in terms of Sunni and Shiite issues. This means that every time the curriculum mentions Aisha, Mother of the Believers, or Rashidun caliphs Abu Bakr and Umar, it must say Hassan ibn Ali was the fifth Rashidun caliph, adding that Rashidun caliphs are five, not four. When we visited a school in the Shiite city of Karbala, as part of a 2011 survey, we found out that teachers ask students to tear textbook pages containing information on Umar. On the other hand, teachers in the Sunni city of Ramadi ask students to tear textbook pages saying Hassan ibn Ali was the fifth Rashidun caliph. This shows that teachers decide their own curricula.

As for Christians and other minorities, politically-motivated and cosmetic changes were introduced to the curricula. In Karbala, when a teacher wanted to educate student how to perform prayers, he followed textbook instructions, which contained two prayer methods: Sunni and Shiite. People protested outside the school, insisting that prayers should be performed the Shiite way. So, the local community, religious leaders, and political parties make their own contribution to the education process.

The curricula are decided and influenced by the religious affiliations of education ministers. Sunni and Shiite contents increase or decrease in the curricula in line with what a Sunni or Shiite education minister wants. Based on this criterion, the curricula change annually in accordance with the country’s political balance of power.

In Iraq, we lack a clear and practical curriculum vision, which can be seen, for example, in the inconsistent use of the terms “Arab nation”, “Muslim nation”, or “Arab Muslim nation”. In Iraq and Syria, social divisions strongly influence education systems, creating “hybrid” curricula that no one complies with, and that entrench division and conflict.

We learned from Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, anthropologist, philosopher, and renowned public intellectual, that the curricula reflect the will of the region’s most influential powers, and that the issue of identity is mainly pertinent to the state. Identity problems in the Arab world remain unresolved.

I have noticed a sort of “ideological opposition” in this discussion. Some talked about Christian Palestine, Christian Iraq, or Christian Syria. Others therefore could say they are Semite who hailed from the Arabian Peninsula. I think the myth of origin represents a single ideological concept. If the curricula in Arab countries emphasise that these regions were originally Arabian, some could talk about the Christian origin of such areas. We therefore remain within a single discourse, ideologically speaking, and the same applies to identity. One of the participants here presented a rereading of the future of culture in Egypt, which is a debatable subject, insisting on the Arabism of the country.

I think such readings are not different from the perspective presented in the curricula in the Arab world.

We need a knowledge-based vision and model; not an ideological model. Arab countries face the challenge of identifying their own identities, whether they are based on citizenship or Arab nationalism. For example, do we talk about the Arabism of Jordan, or the “Jordan First” slogan? Is Iraq an Arab Islamic country? The Iraqi curricula do not discuss Iraq itself; the narrative is about the Arab nation, the Arab Muslim nation, or the Muslim nation. I believe there is a problem in the definition of the state itself.

Identity, religion, legislation, and constitution

In 2003, the political system in Iraq fundamentally changed, but the education process did not, except for some minor and vague revisions. School textbooks were influenced by the new balance of power and the Sunni-Shiite conflict in Iraq.

The 2005 Iraqi Constitution broadly addressed the need for denouncing discrimination and sectarianism. According to Article 2 of the Constitution, “Islam is the official religion of the State and is a fundamental source of legislation.” It did not say Islam is the sole source of legislation. Article 2/A stresses that “no law that contradicts the established provisions of Islam may be established”. This paragraph generated a lot of debate because it did not specify the provisions of Islam. Article 2/B says: “No law that contradicts the principles of democracy may be established.” The two paragraphs contradict each other, but this contradiction went unnoticed. Practically, the Lower House of Parliament and the entire state did not comply with any democratic principle. A majority of post-2003 laws clearly contradicted democratic principles. The Constitution specifies how the Federal Court works as well as the appointment of its members. In the absence of a special law governing the court, questions have been raised whether those members have veto powers. Nevertheless, the court has committed to reject any law that clearly contradicts Islamic provisions, which can be interpreted in line with balance of power in Iraq.

The Constitution also guarantees the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people and guarantees the full religious rights of all individuals to freedom of religious belief and practice such as Christians, Yazidis, and Mandi Sabians. Some people protested that the Constitution did not mention other sects. The Constitution focused on religious rights, but did not emphasise citizenship rights.

The Constitution also highlights civil and political rights. “Iraqis are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, origin, colour, religion, creed, belief or opinion, or economic and social status,” Article 14 stipulates.

But other laws are problematic. Although pre-2003 Iraq was considered a secular state, three 1971 education ministry laws stressed that its mission was to prepare citizens faithful to God, loyal to their nation, equipped with knowledge, and committed to the rights and duties of citizenship. The

laws also stipulated that the ministry's duty was to ensure citizens have well-established spiritual and ethical values, honouring the characteristics of Arab Islamic culture.

In 1990s, Iraq launched the so-called Al Hamlah Al Imaniyah (faith campaign), under which a new education ministry law was issued in 1998. According to this law: "The ministry aims to create a generation of cognisant citizens who believe in God, love their country, and their Arab nation, believe in its mission and goals (unity, freedom, and socialism), and fully understand citizenship rights and duties, as well as freedom and responsibility in line with the Constitution."

The concept of citizenship in this law has no specified definition and its governed by the Constitution. Between 1971 and 1994, the curricula focused on nationalism and Arabism, approach, but after the "faith campaign" school textbooks took a nationalist-Islamic approach, which became part of identity, creating unclarity in the education process.

After 2003, in a supposedly democratic state, the education law in 2011 became more confusing and adaptive to the Islamic approach. The law says: "Creating a generation of cognisant citizens who believe in God, as well as religious, ethical, and national values, love their country, and are committed to its unity, democratic values, and freedom of expression." The first part of the text contradicts the second: Citizens who believe in God, as well as religious, ethical, and national values, and at the same time believe in democracy, and freedom of expression. This contradiction strongly influences the curricula, which was imposed by the state.

The education process and the curricula in Iraq are torn by nationalist and Islamic values, and by Sunni and Shiite doctrines, despite some confused and cosmetic efforts and attempts to keep non-Muslims happy.

Page 90 in the fifth-grade Islamic education textbook, drafted by an education ministry committee, says: "The Quran, and Hadith accept that differences exist among Muslims or between them and non-Muslims as long as such differences are governed by sharia." So, this means that accepting differences is conditioned on sharia, in which the "other" has no say.

Based on all that, we have a "hybrid", and unclear curriculum, which I describe as "fabricated" or "forged". The identity struggle and conflict in Iraq impose themselves on the curriculum, which is not being practically honoured anyway. The hidden curriculum has always dominated the education process.

The Jordanian Case: Identity and Portrayal of Arab Christians in Jordanian Curricula: Reality and Ambitions¹⁶

By Basel Saliba

Consultant, Assessor, Trainer and Coach

Organisational excellence, leadership development, and capacity building

Introduction

The curriculum approach to values and principles of pluralism, diversity, accepting differences, human rights, and citizenship, has been a subject of debate in Jordan for many years. The debate has intensified following the Arab Spring, particularly with the rise of Takfiri groups.

This paper focuses on identity and portrayal of Arab Christians in Jordanian courses of study, as part of a conference discussing how the “other” is perceived in regional countries. The “other” could be different or distinct in terms gender, religion, beliefs, origin, opinion, political orientation, culture, human geography...etc. In an attempt to provide a balanced assessment, the paper presents the viewpoint of Jordan’s Ministry of Education (MoE) on accomplishments made so far, as well as a critical reading of how Christians are portrayed in the curricula, showing what needs to be done and the existing reality. The paper touches upon the researcher’s work with the MoE to revise specific curricular content that has impacted Jordanian students, particularly Christians, making key recommendations on the existing curricula or courses of study currently under development.

In order to enrich the debate and present a diversified approach, the paper cites other researches as well as authors who wrote about the issue, and gives examples on the aforementioned concepts. Readers can refer to more examples in detail by examining references mentioned in the paper.

It is noteworthy that Jordan espouses modernism and enjoys stability despite threats from extremist groups sweeping the Middle East as well as turmoil and turbulence wreaking havoc on the region. The history of the Jordanian state reflects nurture of different religious components.

The researcher hopes that such studies and ideas will enhance stability factors, bridge gaps, and expand the base of curricula to support the inclusivity in general.

The researcher appreciates efforts of the Al Quds Centre for Political Studies to shed light on this key issue at a critical time for the development drive of Arab societies.

The constant need for development is a natural process for all the state’s education and social systems. This is particularly true in developing countries, including Jordan, undergoing fundamental

¹⁶ A paper presented at the regional conference, “Portrayal of Christians and the ‘Other’ in the Curricula of Regional Countries”, organised in Beirut by Al Quds Centre for Political Studies, and Danmission on March 4-5, 2016.

changes. Educational institutions around the world have always researched and are still scrutinising challenges pertinent to the portrayal of the “other” in curricula and the education process as a whole. Ongoing improvement, and thorough examination of stakeholder feedback, as well as learning lessons from failure and success of other countries and institutions are essential.

Portrayal of the ‘other’ in the curricula, as viewed by MoE

MoE statements indicated that the ministry is aware of the need for curricular changes and that education authorities are working to introduce this change. A lot has been accomplished to address curricular issues, according to Minister of Education, Dr. Abdullah Thuneibat. He was quoted by Al Ghad daily newspaper (February 10, 2016) as saying that the ministry “has gone a long way to redact and reauthor school curricula and school textbooks, foremostly for the first, second and third grades, whose courses of study were completely redrafted. This has encouraged some Arab countries to request these textbooks for their own schools.”

The curriculum administration at the MoE told Al Ghad (July 7, 2015) that “curriculum improvement is an ongoing and nonstop process that is being conducted in line with education and social standards as well as international developments ... the administration welcomes any researcher or visitor who wants to learn about its work and procedures.”

Dr. Fayez Rabee’, head of a committee in charge of developing national and civil curricula, directly listed the values that the panel focused on. According to Rabee’ “these values are: respecting other people’s views and opinions; dialogue; persevering security; renouncing violence; respecting diversity, pluralism, tolerance, and rule of law; enhancing the principles of justice, and equality, and renouncing radicalism, sectarianism, and regionalism. In history curriculum, we presented the Islamic view of the ‘other’, contribution to the Islamic civilisation, and contribution of Christians to the scientific movement. We talked about Christian influences on Islamic art, and emphasised the principles of freedom, democracy, renouncing discrimination, racism, and wars.”¹⁷

1. Critical perspective and recommendations on portrayal of Arab Christians in curricula

a. Researched portrayal

Scientific methods require a balanced approach. Therefore, the researcher starts by presenting part of the bright side of Christian identity in education before discussing critical views. Christian schools were among the first educational institutions established in Jordan, providing a unique educational model that attracted different segments of the Jordanian society. With their educational programmes, school textbooks, and the educational environment in general, these schools reflected a positive image of Christians. The schools were permitted to teach Christianity to Christian students, and Islam to Muslim students. The Jordanian government has yet

¹⁷ Rabee’ F. *Role of Curricula and Education Process in Fighting Radicalism and Terrorism*. Amman. Al Rai newspaper. December 10, 2015.

to implement a decision taken several years ago, to teach Christianity at public schools.

Currently, within the debate on the need for improving portrayal of the “other”, including Christians, in the general curricula, educators say changes have been made. These changes include attempts to promote religious tolerance, placing a picture showing a church next to a mosque, mentioning Christian archaeological sites in Jordan, and adding chapters to textbooks about human rights, tolerance, pluralism ... etc. But in the researcher’s opinion, the portrayal of Christians should be deeper than that. First, the curricula need to present an inclusive identity for all Jordanians. Although Jordanian school textbooks do not attack Christian identity, Christian students do not find in the curricula an identity that they can relate to. Christian identity is either marginalised, or distorted. Curriculum administrators should meet the pressing need for addressing challenges facing the Jordanian society as a whole, particularly those impacting the Charitarian component. Some of these challenges have existed for a long period of time, while others resulted from regional developments, the rise of Takfiri and terrorist groups as well as their abuse of everyone, especially those deemed as part of the “other”.

b. Inclusivity in the curricula: What does it mean?

It means a rich and diversified content; not one colour. The researcher has written that education authorities should use the discussion papers of King Abdullah II and the debate that followed for guidance and as reference. “Within the educational content, the other opinion could mean portrayal of women as well as their different roles and types; a mother and worker, and the diversified culture of Jordanians in terms of beliefs, and origin. Not all people are of one colour.”¹⁸

This also means establishing these values in the education process as a whole. “Cementing the principle of respecting other people’s opinions and views in the education system requires mentioning the other opinion fairly in citations, clarifications, and civilizational/cultural contribution. The other opinion should be referred to in scientific sources of information and by experts, enabling Jordanian students to examine such a diversity when they read school textbooks, engage in class conversation, or interact with the education system. Education should establish a democratic society, citizenship values, and teach students human rights, and rule of law. Students need not only to read about these principles, but also practise and live them constantly in class, school parliaments, election, decision making process, and dialogue on challenges and differences.”¹⁹

Accordingly, effective learning and education mean not only obtaining basic values, but also forming approaches and skills necessary to support these principles.²⁰

¹⁸ Saliba B. *Will Education Authorities Use the King’s Discussion Papers as Reference?* Amman. Ammannet. April 4, 2015

¹⁹ Saliba B. *Will Education Authorities Use the King’s Discussion Papers as Reference?* Amman. Ammannet. Amman. April 4, 2015

²⁰ Bousnina M. Director General, ALESCO. *Development of Civil Education in the Education System of the Arab World*. Beirut? Arab Thought Foundation.

Another example, is that apparently, school textbooks talk about pluralism, but the content does not reflect it. Reviewing changes made, education researcher Dalal Salameh says: “A reading of the new textbooks’ contents reveals a contradiction between the values promoted and the backdrop against which this promotion takes place. In essence, the new school textbooks explain to students the concept of ‘pluralism’ and encourage its adoption, while at the same time presenting a unilateral and limited vision. Lessons call on students to be tolerant of others, while, at the same time, obscuring the ‘others’ by not providing any unbiased description of them -- a requirement of understanding and acceptance. Although complete sections are devoted to the discussion of ‘citizenship’, the concept of citizenship based on equality between all citizens is pulverised by the fact that the contents display a clear bias toward one group of citizens at the expense of others -- a bias at times based on religion and at times based on gender.”²¹

The values-based narrative does not necessarily mean that the curricula actually enrich student understanding of these values.

c. Addressing ignorance of Arab Christian culture

While Jordanian Christians know a lot about Jordanian Muslims, the last-mentioned usually do not have the opportunity to learn from the curricula about the ideology and culture of Christians. And it goes without saying that “it is not possible to read the cultural, ideological, and social role of Christians in Jordan, without understanding activities of Arab Christians in the Levant”.²²

Dr. Bassam Abdul Salam Al Botush highlights the need for tackling this ignorance: “We have to admit that Jordanian Christians live the Islamic culture on daily basis; they feel it, study it at school and university, and live its rituals and traditions such as Ramadan and Eid holidays. This enables Jordanian Christians to better understand the Islamic culture. But at the same time, there is lack of awareness of the Christian culture and ignorance of the social and religious characteristics of Arab Christians. There is also ignorance of the Arab Christian role in the Islamic civilizational, cultural and historical systems.”²³

According to a study conducted by Dr. Hind Abu Al Shaar on the curricular gap, “The curricula provide Jordan’s Christian citizens with good Islamic knowledge and information, helping them form an integrated cultural understanding of the society as well as their fellow Muslim citizens, who make up the majority of population. Jordanian Christians become more aware of the country’s culture when they study Islamic courses at university. But universities are responsible for failing to educate

²¹ Salameh D. *New School Textbooks Negate Their Own Promotion of Pluralism*. September 16, 2015.

²² Abu Shaar H. *The Culture of Christians in Jordan*. Amman. The Thoria Centre for Studies.

²³ Botush A. *Muslim-Christian Coexistence: Karak as a Model*. Wasatyea Forum. December, 2012.

Muslim citizens on the culture of their fellow Christian citizens. Even academics share this unfortunate ignorance with men in the street.”²⁴

This ignorance causes all sorts of misunderstanding, disagreement, and, sometimes, abuse. Dealing with these problems in the curricula necessitates openness, education and special attention.

d. Emphasising civilizational role of Arab Christians

Jordanian Christians are citizens with full rights. Arab Christians have lived on this land for 2,000 years, playing a key role in the Islamic Golden Age and Al Nahada (awakening or renaissance) in the Arab world.²⁵

Arab Christians helped establish culture and education, and have contemporary contributions to the fields of education, management/administration, politics, culture, art, society, as well as domestic and foreign affairs. Joining Muslims in the decolonisation struggle and securing the independence of Arab states, Arab Christians were role models.²⁶

The curricula rarely mention Jordanian or other Arab Christians, and sometimes give examples on contributions of Christians in the past without indicating their current economic and cultural roles.²⁷

Emphasising the religious, and not national, identity and assuming that all readers are Muslim, the curricula do not refer to religious diversity in Jordan or other countries around the world, failing to point out Christian contributions in Jordan or their full citizenship rights. The curricula ignore Arab Christian human and civilizational existence in pre-Islamic Arabia, their rich contributions to the Arab Islamic civilization, and their international influence. Christians “do not know that they played a role in building the Arab Islamic civilization. How can my children feel that they belong to this civilization?”²⁸

All these issues are not confronted, making non-Christians disregard the past and present role of Christians, who, as a result, raise questions about their historical and civilizational heritage.

In the curricula, the promoted family, humanitarian, and educational concepts are not associated with Christian heritage and beliefs because all these values and principles are presented from an Islamic perspective. Salameh says about school textbooks: “Students learn the value of hard work, helping to the poor, respect for freedom, the value of seeking knowledge, humility, respect for one’s parents, generosity, tolerance, and civility in speech and decorum. But, no one taught those students that these are universal human values, shared by the adherents of myriad

²⁴ Abu Shaar H. *The Culture of Christians in Jordan*. Amman. The Thoria Centre for Studies.

²⁵ Wikipedia. *Christian influences in Islam*.

²⁶ Bin Talal, Prince H. *Christianity in the Arab World*. London: Arabesque Int., 1995. p. 130.

²⁷ Lahham M., Patriarchal Vicar to Jordan of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. *Islamists and Arab Christians seminar*. Amman. October 13, 2012.

²⁸ Dabbour, I., parish priest of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jordan. Amman. *Arab Christians and Apostolic Exhortation seminar*. October, 2012.

belief systems around the world. Rather, these values have been tied exclusively to Islam and presented as an exceptional feature of the faith.”²⁹

Such problems could make some students deal with others in a condescending manner, disregarding their good traits and refusing to learn from them.

As they read the Arabic language textbooks, Jordanian students are unaware that “the French Dominican fathers in Mosul, Iraq, introduced the first Arabic language printing press in the second half of the 19th century -- which was a key factor in advancing the Arabic language.”³⁰

The students also do not know that Arab Christians, such as Yahya ibn Adi, Ibn Zar’ah, al-Antaki, and others, recorded more than 10,000 18th century manuscripts.³¹

The curricula do not credit Arab Christians for “preserving the Arabic language when the Ottomans imposed Turkification on all Arabs.”³²

e. Raising awareness of Christian beliefs and culture

Belief in the divine or holy books is always associated, particularly in class, with the narrative that today’s Holy Scripture was distorted. The “other” is not allowed to express their viewpoints in this regard. The curricula do not cite or quote the Holy Scripture, even if its ideas do not contradict Islamic beliefs and are acceptable by everyone. For example, the proverbs of Solomon, well-known for his wisdom, are not included in the curricula. He famously said: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” There are no quotes from Jesus Christ. Why can’t students, for example, read about his words of wisdom? “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”

Events in the history of Christianity are absent in the curricula, or sometimes mentioned from on a non-Christian perspective. School textbooks usually do not take Christian viewpoints into consideration in terms of interpretation of Christianity.³³

Christians are not given the chance to raise awareness of their own beliefs and culture from their own perspectives. Although scientific methods require balance and objectivity, school textbooks, including those with topics on Christian affairs, do not list the Holy Scripture as part of their references.

On occasions, some religious texts that are unacceptable by Christians were cited as part of Christianity’s holy books. For example, the Gospel of Barnabas contains a number of historical, geographic, scientific, logical and ideological anachronisms and incongruities, which also are rejected by educated Muslims. The same applies to the

²⁹ Salameh D. *New School Textbooks Negate Their Own Promotion of Pluralism*. Taqadom.mr. September 16, 2015.

³⁰ Ameen E. *Arab Christians in the Arab Islamic Civilization*. Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper. London. November 16, 2010.

³¹ Khoury J., Al Liqa’ Centre. *Arab Christians and Apostolic Exhortation seminar*. Amman. October 14, 2012.

³² Al Ghouri E. *A Visit to the Arab Christian Mind in the Era of the Arab Spring*. Amman. Al Ghad newspaper. July 13, 2012.

³³ Al Ishmawi. F. *Portrayal of the Other in Western and Islamic Curricula*.

Book of Enoch and Book of Ezra, which are part of the general knowledge textbook, as well as the Psalms of Solomon, mentioned in the history textbook of the 10th grade. School textbooks do not indicate that all these books are not approved by Christians as part of the Holy Scripture.

For a more specific example, take what the curricula say about the Dead Sea Scrolls, or Qumran Caves Scrolls. Textbooks of the seventh, 10th, and 12th grades have fallacies about the origins of Christianity, which this paper discusses below.

Generally, Christianity's global contributions to science, art, architecture, philosophy, and other areas do not exist in school textbooks, which also stop short of mentioning names of Christian scientists and thinkers.³⁴

The cultural narrative is always associated with the Arab Islamic culture, and although Arab Christians are influenced by this culture, they have their own cultural identity.

35

It is important to adopt a choice of words that supports equality, citizenship, and partnership. "Tolerance means the ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with, while coexistence denotes that there are preconditions that must be fulfilled in advance. Therefore, terms such 'partnership' and 'harmony' lead eventually to the principles of inclusive 'citizenship', full rights and constitutional equality granted to all citizens."³⁶

The curricula should also diversify portrayal of women, including Christians, and their different roles. Queen Rania of Jordan told Al Arabiya pan-Arab television news channel in an interview: "There is no single woman that represents Arab woman and there is no unified mould in which to place Arab woman. There is the Arab Muslim woman, the Arab Christian woman, the working Arab woman and the non-working Arab woman. There is the teacher, the caretaker, and there is the engineer, the doctor, the academic, the media woman, the critic. There are those who have taken up positions in the armed forces, the judiciary and government" (October 28, 2013).

f. Incorporating historical events in line with scientific method

Historical events are usually discussed in negative contexts, without giving examples on joint action carried out by people of different faiths or beliefs. The same applies to joint humanitarian and interfaith dialogue initiatives, as well as global environmental, food, health, economic, and peace challenges, which require cooperation regardless of religious or ideological differences.

³⁴ Wikipedia. *Christian influences in Islam*.

³⁵ Habash J., Zaideh S., Sarawi M. *Freedom of Religion: Individual Freedom and Social Order*. Human Rights Documentaries. Amman. Ammannet.net.

³⁶ Bader. R. *Arab Christian Conference in Amman: 10 Years on*. Amman. Sahafi.jo. March 14, 2012.

Also, there are significant historical gaps that are not being addressed objectively, including the history of Jerusalem in Christianity, and history of Christianity in the pre-Islamic period.³⁷

Recounts of historical events in the curricula could widen social gaps. Take the Crusades narrative, for instance -- back then Arabs called them “the Frankish wars”, not Crusades. The curricula do not say that the invaders, who killed many Eastern Christians and Muslims, were on a politically motivated mission, despite its religious characteristics, or that Eastern Christians joined Muslims in resisting the occupiers. The Crusades “constituted a European crime against the Mashriq (the region of the Arab world to the east of Egypt), including Christians and Muslims.”³⁸

History and regional developments show that some radical groups tried to limit Arab identity to Muslims. Despite the ongoing debate on this issue, describing regional history as “Arab Islamic history” not “Arab and Islamic history”, breaks the connection between Christian students and their regional history, or marginalise them. It is worth noting that the Education Law refers to “Arab and Islamic history”.

The curricula give examples on how the Church sometimes opposed scientists, such as Galileo Galilei, although the issue was later reassessed, and clarified. School textbooks overlook many accomplishments and achievements of Christian scientists, whose contributions throughout history served humanity. Opposing or persecuting scientists was not limited to Christianity or other organised religions.

School textbooks should support objective reading and understanding of history. They should “encourage students to realise that our fate and future, like our present and past, form a shared history that we make together.”³⁹

Instead of reading about means to strengthen social bonds, Jordanian students learn about historical events that could widen the gap between adherents of different religions and ideologies. Analyst Mohammad Al Momani writes on this issue saying: “The curricula need to re-examine the past and deal with it as history not as religion. History is not sacrosanct and it should be analysed within the right parameters of time frame and place, leading to a well-established culture of tolerance and coexistence.”

g. Inclusivity and fairness in addressing religious dimensions

Covering the Islamic dimension is important, but the curricula increased the religious content in one direction, making Christian students feel more alienated. Those students should understand the Islamic culture but they cannot relate to the curricular content, facing a major identity challenge.⁴⁰

³⁷ Bader. R. *Role of the Curricula in Promoting the Other*. Amman. Abouna.org. July 28, 2015.

³⁸ Ghanadri S. *The Eastern Christianity and Relation with Islam*. Haifa. Kul-Shee publishing house. 2013.

³⁹ Sabbah M. *Conference of Arab Christians in Jordan and Palestine*. Amman. March 11, 2002.

⁴⁰ Twal. I. *Challenges Facing Christian Schools in Jordan*. Amman. Abouna.org. February 18, 2013.

Specialised studies recommend that “the MoE take necessary procedures to educate students on cultures and religions in Jordan to help different social components exchange knowledge and create shared understanding and tolerance.”⁴¹

Commenting on the new school textbooks, education expert Hosni Aiesh says: “The Education Council turned not only Arabic language, civil and national education, general knowledge textbooks into religious documents, but also all science textbooks.”⁴²

Observance of cultural norms of the Jordanian society is important and fundamental, but marginalising other cultures, particularly in relation with Christian students, creates a sense of alienation.

Take for example human rights. Some school textbooks promote human rights, but, did these books actually protected human rights, including freedom of expression? Apparently, the human rights and cultural narrative are directly and mainly linked to Islam, disregarding any other culture.

Dr. Thouqan Obeidat, former curriculum administrator, remarks that the new textbooks “did not make any progress in the area of human rights. The same old idea that Islam is the leader of human rights protection remains unchanged. This could be partly true, but all other religions talked about human rights. What about the Code of Hammurabi, Magna Carta, Christian traditions and the Holy Scripture, and teachings of Confucius? In the field of national education, we are supposed to objectively promote a national inclusive culture. So, what does it mean to focus on one specific culture?”⁴³

In the fourth grade’s new national education textbook, page 25 reads: “The people of my nation adhere to Islam, and in my country, Muslims and Christians live harmoniously.” This sentence rules out the concepts of equality and citizenship rights granted in the constitution, regardless of religion, race, or colour.⁴⁴

Such issues fuel “other” students’ feelings of isolation as well as fears, which are already growing due to the regional unrest.

It is necessary to balance the curricular narrative of the religion of the majority of Jordanians, without neglecting the rights and culture of other citizens. Analyst Mohammad Abu Rumman says: “The problem is no that the majority of Jordanians are Muslim; history and religion textbooks are disregarding other cultural knowledge and religions. It is not only about non-Muslim citizens and their right to be recognised culturally, educationally, and nationally. It is also about raising the next generation

⁴¹ Musa M., Doghmi T., Biss H., Abul Haija S., Shamma M. *Towards Full Citizenship: Impact of Religious Affiliation on Civil Rights and Religious Freedom*. Amman. Community Media Network. Ammannet.net. 2012. p. 62

⁴² Aiesh H. *Science Textbooks: Curriculum Damages Religion and Science*. Amman. Amad.jo. February 15, 2016.

⁴³ Obeidat T. *The Curricula and School Textbooks: Between Identity Building and Self-Destruction*. Amman. Al Ghad newspaper. October 18, 2015.

⁴⁴ Sabbagh R. *The Curricula of Ignorance: Have Mercy on Jordan*. Amman. Al Ghad newspaper. January 6, 2016.

and ensuring it respects pluralism, and diversity, as well as differences in beliefs, ideology, and culture.”⁴⁵

h. Ignorance leads to radicalism and abuse

This ignorance causes all sorts of misunderstanding, disagreement, and, sometimes, abuse -- problems requiring openness, education, and special care. In many cases, ignorance of the history and culture of Arab Christians creates the false perception that they are strangers to the Arab heritage and language, regardless of their actual contributions. “We forget that the Islamic civilization owes Arab Christian for many achievements and accomplishments, which should not be forgotten. Arab Christians showed supreme faith for centuries. They recorded and developed sciences and philosophy, providing a massive library of medicine, agriculture and science books. Producing many physicians, scientists, and philosophers, Arab Christians played a key role in establishing and developing Arab and Islamic sciences, as well as in translating ancient Greek philosophy and science books.”⁴⁶

Sometimes Arab Christians are wrongly associated with historical conflicts in the region, without realising they shared with others the good and bad. They are being judged based on their population numbers, ignoring the fact that Arab Christians are an integral and original social component as well as citizens with full rights.

Ignorance also affects the curricula, promoting one viewpoint, which deprives students of opportunities to engage in building partnerships, cooperation, and bridges of trust with others, as well as dealing with differences.

It creates fears of dominance of a religious sectarian identity, which could split even adherents of the same faith, and overshadow national identity. “Arab Christians are worried about the rise of Islamist groups and the emphasis on the religious, and not the national, identity, particularly in formal education.”⁴⁷

Ignorance and bigotry raise questions and cast doubt on the identity, affiliation, and civilizational role of Arab Christians -- which could lead to radicalism by associating Arab Christians with Western aggression against the region.⁴⁸

i. Heeding psychological needs of students

To support the educational goals, students should be able to fulfil their psychological, emotional, and social needs, including self-image, self-awareness, self-esteem,

⁴⁵ Abu Rumman M. *War of Curricula ... Headnotes (1)*. Amman. Al Ghad newspaper. February 17, 2016.

⁴⁶ Gharaibeh I. *Arab Christians*. Amman. Al Ghad newspaper. January 6, 2012.

⁴⁷ Sinno A. *Mashreq Christians: From Pioneers to Decline, and to Economic, Cultural, and National Loss*. 2011.

⁴⁸ Khoury J., Al Liqa' Centre. *Arab Christians and Apostolic Exhortation seminar*. Amman. October 14, 2012.

personal identity formation, social identity, moral development, and social group standards.⁴⁹

Many of such needs are linked with the way students view themselves or their relations with others. The curricula should ensure that these needs are met, while promoting the formation of positive mental attitude, and multiculturalism, and discouraging prejudice, and discrimination.⁵⁰

Schools should help build constructive social relations through which students develop themselves in a safe environment.⁵¹

Feelings of exclusion, creating barriers between Christian students and their peers, undermining their beliefs, disregarding their history, and disintegrating their culture will severely affect student needs and learning process.

j. Christian engagement in curriculum development is necessary

It is important and logical to engage Jordanian Christian educators and researchers in curriculum development, particularly topics discussing Christian affairs or inclusive education subjects, such as national and civil education, history and social sciences. In addition to those specialists, other Christian experts and students, should also partake in curriculum assessment.^{52 53}

It is recommended that the Education Council group Christian representatives with sufficient knowledge and expertise. Youth and women's groups, as well as civil society organisations should also be involved.

k. Promoting pluralism and accepting differences

This issue applies to all students regardless of their affiliations. How can students learn about pluralism, and accepting differences if the curricula, under any pretext, conceal all aspects pertinent to the "other"? This does not back efforts to promote social openness, dialogue, tolerance, and accepting differences, particularly among youths, while at the same fighting student violence, and bigotry. Such curricular problems do not help youths build confidence and succeed in work in other countries. They contradict and weaken the principles of reform, empowerment, democracy, citizenship, multiculturalism, freedom of expression, equality, and social value. In conclusion, "it is unimaginable to think that all people have the same

⁴⁹ Wikipedia. *Self-image, self-awareness, self-esteem, identity formation, identity (social science), moral development, social group.*

⁵⁰ Wikipedia. *Positive mental attitude, multiculturalism, prejudice, discrimination, reputation.*

⁵¹ Obaid E. *Enhancing Self-Confidence of Students.* Amman. Al Rai newspaper.

⁵² Saliba B. *Scientific Errors in the Curricula.* Amman. Ammannet.net. March 6, 2015.

⁵³ Bader. R. *Role of the Curricula in Promoting the Other.* Amman. Abouna.org. July 28, 2015.

thoughts, religious beliefs, or views about life ... this idea defies the logic of life, and contradicts human experience and history.”⁵⁴

l. Curriculum development is key to facing challenges

Christians in the Middle East are being targeted, undergoing exile, extermination, aggression, pillage, captivity, sexual assault, humiliation, terrorism, and cross-border ideological radicalism. “The Mashriq expelled more than two million of its Christian nationals in 10 years (2003-2013). It is a serious problem, and warning bells should start to ring.”⁵⁵

The forced migration of Arab Christians is a true crisis, which indicates that Islam rejects the “other”. “Arab Christians expect their Arab Muslim brothers to effectively help them meet these challenges, including the curricula.”⁵⁶

King Abdullah II of Jordan stressed that “we should all work together to boost Christian presence and curb their migration...”, according to a Royal Hashemite Court statement (March 11, 2012). It is true that “Jordanian Christians did not face persecution, but in the back of their heads they have deep fears of the unrest in Egypt, Iraq, and Syria.”⁵⁷

Based on that, the curricula have to be adapted for all these challenges as well as calls to enhance Christian presence, promote tolerance, renounce radicalism, and fight bigotry, bigots, anti-Christian violence, religious discrimination, and condescension encouraged by radical groups.

Taking into consideration that the radical groups, who bused Arab Christians and others, have nothing to do with true Islam, curriculum developers have moral obligation to speak out against this abuse and do justice to Arab Christians by reassuring them⁵⁸, improving their image, and ensuring equality in citizenship.

m. Reforming curriculum development philosophy

Despite many MoE decisions on curriculum development, a qualitative leap is still needed to reform curriculum philosophy to encourage and support an all-inclusive identity in the education process. Saed Karajeh says a 2015 conference overseen by the MoE on education development made many recommendations, but fell short of reviewing the philosophy and vision of education as a precondition for reform.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Abu-Nimer M., Khoury A., Welty E. *Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle East*. Washington, D.C. The United States Institute of Peace. 2007. p. xviii.

⁵⁵ Rantawi O. *Arab Christians*. Amman. Addustour newspaper. October 1, 2013.

⁵⁶ Sammak M. *Arab Christian Challenges*. Beirut. Al Mustaqbal newspaper. September 9, 2013.

⁵⁷ Fanek. F. *Christians in the Middle East*. Amman. Al Rai newspaper. July 23, 2013.

⁵⁸ Qulta Y., deputy patriarch of the Coptic Catholic Church in Egypt. *Islamists and Arab Christians seminar*. Amman. October 13, 2012.

⁵⁹ Karajeh S. *No to Education Reform*. Amman. Al Ghad newspaper. August 18, 2015.

So, although MoE officials acknowledged the need for improving the curricula, and despite steps taken by the ministry to change some school textbooks, improvements were not sufficient enough to reform the curricula, ensuring that portrayal of the “other” as well as multiculturalism are emphasised and protected.

n. Jordanian coexistence model

Jordan constantly seeks to become an exemplar of coexistence and tolerance. On numerous occasions, Christians clerics and world leaders expressed gratitude to Jordan for its efforts in this regard. This should motivate education authorities to reflect these values on the education process, particularly that some of leaders who hailed the Jordanian model, called for improving the curricula and portrayal of the “other.” King Abdullah II has told educators and students that “one of the most significant aspects of the empowerment we seek for the country’s youth - male and female students - is the entrenchment of democracy, dialogue and intellectual pluralism as high values embraced in schools, with the aim of producing generations that respect diversity, debate in the best and most gracious ways, accept different opinions and understand the importance of persuading others of their views through effective communication.”⁶⁰

In this turbulent region, one of the most serious challenges facing all people is learning how to coexist and accept differences. For education policymakers, this challenge adds a new dimension to the curricular goals. They should ask themselves whether the curricular content helps Jordanian students coexist with others, accept differences, and deal with the massive global diversity in the internet age.

2. The Dead Sea Scrolls: Religious and identity fallacies in the curricula

Introduction

This section discusses fallacies about Christianity that affected Christian identity. The mistaken beliefs are in part two of the history school textbook of the seventh and 10th grades, as well as the general knowledge textbook, level one and two, of the general secondary education. This example on the fallacies in textbooks should not be generalised, but this discussion seeks to draw lessons, and help improve the curricula by highlighting the required legislative and education process changes.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, or Qumran Caves Scrolls, were discovered in a series of eleven caves around the site known as Wadi Qumran near the Dead Sea in the West Bank between 1946 and 1956. The consensus is that the scrolls date from the last three centuries BCE and the first century CE. The scrolls grabbed worldwide attention for revealing lots of religious,

⁶⁰ King’s letter to Jordanian students on the occasion of the start of the scholastic year, 2012-2013. Amman. September 2, 2012.

historical, civilizational information on the region. Researchers produced thousands of scholarly articles and studies on the scrolls, which are still under debate. The manuscripts include fragments from every book of the Old Testament, except for the Book of Esther. They are of crucial significance as scientists believe the scrolls shed light on the accuracy of the Holy Scripture. The Dead Sea Scrolls project of Jordan's Yarmouk University as well as National Geographic's documentary, *Decoding the Dead Sea Scrolls*, provide more details on the manuscripts.^{61 62 63 64 65 66}

a. The Dead Sea Scrolls topic in the curricula

The school textbook content on the Dead Sea Scrolls casts doubt on the Holy Scripture, saying that the manuscripts "contain Old Testament books that are different from Torah books, recognised by the Jewish people."^{67 68}

Also, "the scrolls open the door to different interpretations of history, and comparison between the manuscripts and the current texts."⁶⁹

The curricula cite the Gospel of Barnabas⁷⁰ although it is not recognised as part of the Holy Scripture because it is full of errors, and fallacies, contradicting Christianity, Islam, science, history, geography, and logic. Other examples include interpretations of the Holy Scripture, such as the prophecies in the Gospel of John, in a manner inconsistent with other Holy Scripture books and Christian ideology.⁷¹

The content questions the origins and roots of Christianity, saying "the door is open to religious assumptions, mainly that Essenes were the founders of Christianity."⁷²

According to the textbooks, "the scrolls revealed many sides, and raised questions."⁷³

Scientifically, all religious books raise questions. So, why do the curricula question issues relevant to Christian students specifically?

The textbooks include citations that undermine the ideology of Charitarian students. They quote George Bernard Shaw as saying: "I have always held the religion of Muhammad in high estimation because of its wonderful vitality. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess that assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence which can make itself appeal to every age."⁷⁴

⁶¹ Jordanian Dead Sea Scrolls project. Irbid, Jordan. Yarmouk University.

⁶² Magness J. *The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. New York. Cambridge University Press. 2012.

⁶³ Schuller E. *The Dead Sea Scrolls: What Have We Learned?* London. SCM Press. 2006.

⁶⁴ Ghoul O., Bakhit M. *Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls*. Irbid, Jordan. Jordanian Dead Sea Scrolls project, Yarmouk University. 2009.

⁶⁵ Abedi M. *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. 3rd Edition. Irbid, Jordan. Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology, Yarmouk University. 2011.

⁶⁶ National Geographic. *Decoding the Dead Sea Scrolls*. 2007.

⁶⁷ General knowledge, secondary education, p. 153.

⁶⁸ History of ancient civilizations, part 2, 7th grade, p. 11.

⁶⁹ General knowledge, secondary education, p. 154.

⁷⁰ General knowledge, secondary education, p. 163.

⁷¹ General knowledge, secondary education, p. 163.

⁷² General knowledge, secondary education, p. 154.

⁷³ General knowledge, secondary education, p. 154.

⁷⁴ History of civilizations, part 2, 10th grade, p. 82.

Citing Tafsir al-Tabari, the content says: “Any text in the divine books that contradicts Quran teachings is invalid.”⁷⁵

The content adds: “... the return of all the faithful peoples and tribes, descendants of the great human father Abraham, to the faith of peace, Islam; no other religion.”⁷⁶

How do Christian students see themselves when they read these words? How do Muslim students view Christian students? The content could be part of Islamic culture textbooks, but incorporating it in books studied by all students, including Christians, is questionable.

b. Reaction of Christians to the Dead Sea Scrolls topic

Christians repeatedly expressed dismay over the Dead Sea Scrolls topic in the curricula. The researcher held meetings with many Christian students, families, teachers, and educators to see how they feel about the issue:

- The topic fragmentises unity of students in class, making Christian students have feelings of humiliation and weakness. A student said: “The faith of Christian students is being attacked, and the officials are keeping mum.” Another noted: “I hate this topic and how they are trying to deny our faith.” According to a mother who attending one the meetings with families: “This topic is full of hatred of Christians.” A school principal remarked: “Female Christian students used to leave the culture class in tears.” Student families criticised that “churches, as well as Christian bodies and schools are silent about such humiliation.”
- The topic allows some teachers to further criticise the ideology of Christian students. “A teacher thought that the curriculum was not enough, so he added outside references to prove that the Holy Scripture is distorted,” a student said. Another agreed, noting: “One teacher used outside references to support the idea that the Holy Scripture is distorted.” A third added: “Every time I tried to discuss the topic with the teacher, he accused of being a religious bigot.”
- The topic contradicts the values of citizenship, democracy, religious tolerance, fraternity, coexistence, and openness. “This curriculum questions the meaning of religious tolerance,” said the father of one of the students. Another parent remarked: “This is not religious tolerance; it is destruction of religion.” A third added: “The topic is an example of bigotry and human rights abuse.”
- The topic leads to anger, confusion, constraint, double standards, and frustration over inability to create change. “Why does the MoE permit this topic?” a woman wondered. Several other people expressed frustration. “There is no use of filing complaints. We have done that many times, but no one wants to listen,” one of them said. According to a student: “A teacher

⁷⁵ History of civilizations, part 2, 10th grade, p. 83.

⁷⁶ History of civilizations, part 2, 10th grade, p. 82.,

- attacked and ridiculed the Christian faith. Christian students remained silent because they did not have enough information to respond.”
- The topic creates long-term distorted thinking and learning patterns. “These days people think about and question everything. People will not accept such claims without discussion,” said one of the fathers. A female teacher of general knowledge noted: “When I teach students this topic I emphasise that it is unacceptable although it reflects the MoE’s viewpoint.” A male teacher of the same subject said: “I tell my students that the textbook authors were wrong when they imposed their own personal opinion in the content. They should comply with objectivity standards and stick to historical facts.” A female university student quoted her colleague as saying: “Your (holy) book is distorted. We learned that from the general knowledge book at high school.”

c. Cooperation with the MoE to correct errors

The researcher conducted a comprehensive and extensive 250-page study, registered at the National Library under the title “the Desired Values in Education and a Knotty Topic in the Curricula”.⁷⁷

The study contains the researcher’s views on this topic in the three aforementioned textbooks, particularly about the Christian identity, and the civilizational role of Arab Christians, as well as recommendations on curriculum development.

In 2012, the researcher contacted the MoE about fallacies in the curricula, held meetings with curriculum administrators, and presented the study to educational organisations in Jordan. The researcher later wrote an article on these fallacies, headlined “Scientific Errors in the Curricula”.⁷⁸

The MoE Curriculum Administration welcomed the researcher’s remarks and promised to study to them, giving him the opportunity to meet the authors. The researcher’s coordination with the ministry continued between 2013 and 2014, during which curriculum administrators redacted the general knowledge textbook, omitting the most offensive paragraphs, and turning other parts in the textbooks of the seventh and 10th grades to self-efficacy reading only. Also, the MoE worked on substitute textbooks. In late 2015, the Education Council approved the MoE’s decision to abolish the general knowledge textbook of secondary education and replace it with the “history of Jordan” textbook, starting the scholastic year 2016-2017, according to Al Rai newspaper (December 9, 2015)

⁷⁷ Saliba B. *The Desired Values in Education and a Knotty Topic in the Curricula*. Amman. . National Library ISBN 3915/11/2013.

⁷⁸ Saliba B. *Scientific Errors in the Curricula*. Amman. Ammannet.net. March 6, 2015.

d. Other positive efforts

Among those who called for reforming and improving the curricula, including the general knowledge textbook, and specifically the Dead Sea Scrolls topic, were Father Rifaat Bader, MP Jamil Nemri, as well as education experts Aiesh and Obeidt.^{79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86}

Church leaders and politicians have also called for “cleansing the curricula of hatred and bigotry” (abouna.org, November 24, 2014). The Jordanian Dead Sea Scrolls project, which had good recommendations on the issue, conducted a comprehensive review of the manuscripts topic in the curricula, and submitted a detailed report to the MoE.⁸⁷

e. Next steps

Despite the positive decision to abolish the general knowledge textbook of the secondary education, more steps are needed because the Dead Sea Scrolls topic is still being taught to students of the seventh and 10th grades. Also, more than 100,000 Jordanian students studied the topic ahead of the general secondary examination, or Tawjihi, in the summer of 2016. While the state was celebrating the World Interfaith Harmony Week, Christian students were studying this topic, which destroys religious coexistence.

This issue affected more than one million students in the past 10 years. The MoE needs to address such negative effect. It is important to learn lessons, and introduce changes to reform the entire education process and avoiding errors in the new curricula, which this papers discusses below.

3. Reform of education laws

a. Overview of the exiting education law⁸⁸

i. Parts of the law that need inclusivity

The philosophy and objectives of education include:

- Faith in almighty God.
- Belief in the higher ideals of the Arab nation.
- Islam is a system of intellectual behavioural ideology that respects man, exalts the mind and urges for knowledge, work and morality.

⁷⁹ Bader R. *Remarks on the General Knowledge Textbook of Secondary Education*. Amman. Al Rai newspaper. March 5, 2005.

⁸⁰ Bader R. *Teaching Students the Qumran Caves Scrolls*. Amman. Al Rai newspaper. March 1, 2006.

⁸¹ Bader R. *The General Knowledge Textbook: Eight Years On*. Amman. Al Rai newspaper. February 23, 2013.

⁸² Nemri J. *Is This the Culture of Secondary Education Students?* Amman. Al Ghad newspaper. January 1, 2007.

⁸³ Aiesh H. *The Main Weakness of Schools: Puzzles*. Amman. Al Rai newspaper. March 6, 2012.

⁸⁴ Aiesh H. *Philosophy Education in Jordan*. Amman. Addustour newspaper. July 30, 2013.

⁸⁵ Remarks by church leaders in Jordan at the *Arab Christian Challenges* conference. Aleteia.org. September 6, 2013.

⁸⁶ Obeidat T. *Case Study Analysis: Radicalism in the Curricula and Textbooks*. Amman. Al Ghad newspaper. June 30, 2015.

⁸⁷ Jordanian Dead Sea Scrolls project. Irbid, Jordan. Yarmouk University.

⁸⁸ The Education Law No. 3 of 1994 and its amendments. Amman. moe.gov.jo.

- Islam is a system of wholeness that provides virtuous values and principles that from the consciousness of both the individual and the group.
- The relationship between Islam and Arabism is organic.

The first point is usually represented in the education process from an Islamic perspective, which might not take the “other” into consideration. The second point covers the Arab dimension in general, while the third, fourth, and fifth emphasise the Islamic characteristics of the curricula.

ii. Principles in the law that need implementation

These include national and human fundamentals, such as: “The Jordanian people constitute integrated unity, and there is no place for racial, regional, sectarian, tribal, or familial bigotry.” Social fundamentals say: “Jordanians are equal in political, social and economic rights. They are distinguished by their affiliation and contribution to their society;” and: “Respect for freedom and dignity of individuals.” Educational policy fundamentals seek to “ensure that the education process develops learners’ analytical capabilities, critical thinking, initiative-taking, innovation, and dialogue skills, and enhances Arab and Islamic civilizational and human values.” They also encourage “establishing the scientific method in the education system in terms of designing, planning, conducting, and developing research.”

These principles are crucial, but they should be adopted comprehensively and practically in the philosophy of curriculum development. For example, the general knowledge textbook of secondary education included chapters on the Amman Message and human rights, but the same book had parts on the Dead Sea Scrolls, which cast doubt on the faith of Christians, in violation of their rights as well as the Amman Message.

iii. Education rules and instructions, and hidden curriculum

Educators and officials need to pay attention to the hidden curriculum, and its impact on how students absorb textbook values.⁸⁹

Therefore, measures should be taken and incorporated in the education process to protect students against infringement of these values.⁹⁰

Such measures should ensure education and social values are not affected, nonconforming radical references are not cited, and Christian faith and beliefs are not undermined. They need to be supported by clear controls governing and tackling violations in the education system, helping all Jordanians feel that these values are protected by law.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Aeish H. *The Hidden Curriculum, and the Social-Educational Psychology*. Amman. Al Ghad newspaper.

⁹⁰ [Education rules and instructions. Department of Legal Affairs. Moe.gov.jo.](http://moe.gov.jo)

⁹¹ Saliba B. *Will Education Authorities Use the King’s Discussion Papers as Reference?* Amman. Ammannet. April 4, 2015

b. Jordanian Constitution and equality of citizens

According to Article 6 of the Jordanian Constitution: “Jordanians shall be equal before the law with no discrimination between them in rights and duties even if they differ in race, language or religion.” The curricula need to reflect and ensure this equality in all aspects.

c. Legislation, national plans, and democratic values

It is crucial that the education process and curricula comply with national laws, making sure that no one takes the law into their own hands.⁹²

The curricula need to be in line with national strategies, including the 2016-2025 Comprehensive National Plan on Human Rights (Al Rai newspaper, March 3, 2016) Values of democracy and pluralism, including ideas in the King’s discussion papers:⁹³

- Respect for all fellow citizens is the essence of our unity: We need to acknowledge that as Jordanians we are all fellow travellers in the journey ahead, regardless of family, neighbourhood, gender or religious belief.⁹⁴
- Crafting a modern democratic society will be the product of our learning and developing together over time, not a single moment or set of reforms.⁹⁵
- I have the responsibility and honour of guaranteeing that nothing undermines the fundamental elements that make Jordan unique, special, and an oasis of stability: National unity, pluralism, openness, tolerance and moderation.⁹⁶

Students need not only to read about these principles, but also practise and live them constantly in class, school parliaments, election, decision making process, and dialogue on challenges and differences.⁹⁷

d. Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.
- Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

⁹² Obeidat T. *The Curricula and School Textbooks are Human Products*. Al Ghad newspaper. March 20, 2015.

⁹³ Saliba B. *Scientific Errors in the Curricula*. Amman. Ammannet.net. March 6, 2015.

⁹⁴ The King’s First Discussion Paper, *Our Journey to Forge Our Path Towards Democracy*. kingabdullah.jo. December 29, 2012.

⁹⁵ The King’s Second Discussion Paper, *Making Our Democratic System Work for All Jordanians*. kingabdullah.jo. January 16, 2013.

⁹⁶ The King’s Third Discussion Paper, *Each Playing Our Part in A New Democracy*. kingabdullah.jo. March 2, 2013.

⁹⁷ Saliba B. *Will Education Authorities Use the King’s Discussion Papers as Reference?* Amman. Ammannet. April 4, 2015.

e. Jordanian initiatives, as well as regional and international declarations

- The Amman Message: A statement clarifying the true nature of Islam, established by consensus of top Muslim scholars, under the leadership of King Abdullah II of Jordan.
- The World Interfaith Harmony Week.
- The Common Word document, signed and approved by leading Muslim scholars.
- Amman Declaration: A Roadmap for a Better Future for Christians of Arab Countries. Al Quds Centre for Political Studies.
- The Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities.
- The Doha Declaration on the Protection of Spiritual and Intellectual Heritage.

All these initiatives should directly reflect on the curricula. Some of them specifically demand official reform laws and the curricula.

f. UNESCO World Declaration on Education for All

The satisfaction of these needs empowers individuals in any society and confers upon them a responsibility to respect and build upon their collective cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage, to promote the education of others, to further the cause of social justice, to achieve environmental protection, to be tolerant towards social, political and religious systems which differ from their own, ensuring that commonly accepted humanistic values and human rights are upheld, and to work for international peace and solidarity in an interdependent world.

g. UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child

- Article 12/1: States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- Article 29/1/C: The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.

Based on that, the curricula need to be adapted for all these principles. Discrimination, disregarding the culture, ideology, identity, and values of students, and forcing them to learn subjects violating their beliefs raise questions on the constitutionality of the issue and compliance with Jordanian, regional, and international treaties.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Obeidat T. *The Curricula and School Textbooks are Human Products*. Al Ghad newspaper. March 20, 2015.

Conclusion

Many stakeholders were sincerely keen on improving the curricula and education process. The MoE has committed to working with all stakeholders and welcomed recommendations, promising to implement good proposals.⁹⁹

Despite the researcher's personal impression, and experience, he hopes that all stakeholders take this commitment seriously, find common ground, avoid what some have described as a "war of curricula"¹⁰⁰, work collectively on curriculum development, and set an example for students on dialogue and accepting differences.

⁹⁹ Rabee' F. *Is the Attack Against the curricula Justified?* Amman. Al Rai newspaper. February 2, 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Abu Rumman M. *War of Curricula ... Headnotes (1)*. Amman. Al Ghad newspaper. February 17, 2016.

The Lebanese Case: Portrayal of Christians and the ‘Other’ in Curricula and Education System¹⁰¹

Father Dr. George Massouh

Director of the Centre for Christian and Muslim Studies, University of Balamand

Columnist, An-Nahar newspaper

The concept of the “other” pertains to modernism, which is about individuals; not groups. Based on this idea, I, as an Orthodox priest, refuse to be treated as a member of a specific denomination. I am a Lebanese national who should be dealt with as such. I refuse to deal with the state, schools, and institutions through my denomination. So, any debate on homeland, nation, and citizenship is nonsense unless it is centred on individuals, on which societies are built. The “other” is an individual who can be a woman, or a child, my wife, or daughter.

I teach my university students about Al Nahda (awakening or renaissance) in the Arab world, the days of Muhammad Ali of Egypt, Rifa'a Al Tahtawi, and Farah Antun. I wish those days could come back, the days when individual freedoms were fundamental in education. Today, you cannot teach freedom values to the oppressed. Education and schools are the starting point for establishing freedom, democracy, equality, and social security. As a Christian, I am required to question and discuss with the others the way they deal with me based on their religion. It is unacceptable that I am not allowed to discuss Islamic issues such as jizya tax and dhimmis because I am Christian. I demand to discuss sharia that imposes laws on me. I reject the issue of the People of the Book; we are not the People of the Book. We are the people of Jesus Christ. I respect the fact that Quran mentions the People of the Book but I am not one of them. Jesus Christ is more important than the Bible, which was written by humans, unlike Quran that was sent down by Allah. You are required to respect our culture and civilization.

The problem is not with Islamic fundamentalism; it is with despotism, which has plagued this region for long time. Fundamentalism was the result of despotism and the creation of the hateful entity of Israel. What happened is that people were oppressed under the pretext of resisting Israel. But one should be clear and not forget that Islamic fundamentalism is evil.

Portrayal of the ‘other’ in Lebanese curricula and education system

The balance of power and fear among sectarian groups prevents the establishment of a specified religious education model. This balance produced students who know nothing about their own religion or faiths of others. Public religious education segregates Muslims from Christians -- which is harmful to national unity. Students learn together about geography and mathematics, but when

¹⁰¹ A paper presented at the regional conference, “Portrayal of Christians and the ‘Other’ in the Curricula of Regional Countries”, organised in Beirut by Al Quds Centre for Political Studies, and Danmission on March 4-5, 2016.

teachers talk about God and religion, the students get segregated, forming an idea that everything brings us together, except for God. At the 2001 Catholic Schools Conference, I talked about the issue of religious education in Lebanon, saying that there are two models offered to students: the existing system in schools, and a model that neutrally discusses religion. Schools, which are supposed to produce well-educated generations, do not provide neutral information about Jesus Christ or the Prophet Muhammad. Students should learn about religion the same way they get educated on science and philosophy. At a certain age, after 13 or 14 years, students can learn about differences in religions, scientifically and neutrally. This way, students will not be affected by ideas and viewpoints promoted by the media or in the ignorant society. This way students will acquire knowledge neutrally, learning to respect the other. Schools are not mosques or churches, and need to offer neutral education; not dictation. Based on that, students should not be segregated when they learn about religion.

I do not know why Muslims want to prove that the Bible spoke about the Prophet Muhammad. I am not arguing here; I am saying that time is being wasted on unimportant issues. One example is the fuss made 20 years ago, when they said the Gospel of Barnabas represents the true Bible. The church disapproved the Gospel of Barnabas 1,700 years ago, because the church, not God, is responsible for approving or disapproving the Bible. We have four approved books of Bible as well as Jesus Christ who is one God. Why do you question the faith of others? Is it lack of self-confidence that pushes you to look into other religions in order to support your viewpoints? We therefore should provide true knowledge for students, and failure to do so will turn them into robots, and deprive them of freedom, and critical thinking.

Academic essays on religious education offer marginal information, while all European human sciences are absent here. Early Christian and Muslim scholars mastered philosophy, but why do we have animosity towards philosophy these days? We need highly professional experts to develop a curriculum of history of religion in a neutral manner -- a factor that will help produce students with analytical and critical thinking skills. Teachers should be equipped and qualified to present this curriculum in the right way.

Students need to learn about religion in schools because it is part of their journey to acquire knowledge, but it is very dangerous to turn mosques and churches into exclusive religious education providers. Some societies teach students fundamentalism. How can we send our children to such societies? Schools are supposed to present knowledge neutrally, and are under education ministry control.

As for secularism, secular schools can be worse. A secular school in northern Lebanon kicked out a student because he was wearing a cross. This incident almost created a huge problem as Christian families raised a storm of protest that the school allows female students to wear hijab. A teacher, who apparently was influenced by her predominantly Muslim society, justified the action saying hijab is an Islamic duty, but the cross is a Christian symbol. Sometimes, secular oppression is harmful and has diverse effects.

Seven years ago, the Maronite Church announced an initiative to form a committee to prepare a textbook discussing all religions. I was a member of the panel which grouped representatives of all Lebanon's sects. After holding several meetings, we failed to come up with a unified formula due to Sunni-Shiite schism; not Christian-Muslim issues.

In Lebanon, religious leaders and institutions impose themselves and oppress the society. Religious affiliations of people are all what they care about. In this case, self-respect disappears, and religious identity overshadows national identity. We do not feel that we are citizens because we are oppressed.

Islam, its sharia, and rules are responsible for creating minorities. Islam discriminates between Muslims and non-Muslims, and has different standards for Muslims themselves. We therefore cannot blame minorities for being minorities. When Arab Christians sought independence from the Ottomans, they looked for Arabism, not Christianity. They believed that Arabism, socialism, or humanity united them, and searched for common ground with the Muslims. Today I will not let anyone prevent me from building a church, drinking alcohol, or eat pork because I am a Lebanese national and an integral part of this nation. Today's Islam is largely responsible for the absence of minority engagement and participation, and, as an expert in Islamic studies, I cannot provide justification. Centrist Islam failed to confront Islamic fundamentalism. For example, Al Azhar talks about a democratic and constitutional state with fair and free election, but at the same time Al Azhar imposes itself on parliament, deciding the rights of lawmakers. If Al Azhar does not carry out its role in boldly confronting the growing Islamic fundamentalism, I do know where we are heading.

The Palestinian Case: Portrayal of Arab Christians, and the ‘Other’ in the Curricula¹⁰²

Father Dr. Peter Hanna Madros
Palestine

Introduction

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to participate in this conference, where we constructively and boldly discuss how to “lead” the next generations. Pedagogy is the discipline that deals with the theory and practice of education; it thus concerns the study of how best to teach. The word is a derivative of the Greek (paidagōgia), from (paidagōgos), itself a synthesis “I lead”, and (país, paidos) “child”: hence, “to lead a child.” A topic of the conference is how the curricula in the Arab world portray the ‘other’ -- which means not only foreigners and refugees, but also non-Muslims.

A majority of the following remarks and observations has been repeatedly submitted to the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Hopefully, they would not be “concealed”.

I. Portrayal of Christians in Arab curricula

1. Islamic education textbooks

The Quran refers to the “Nazarenes”, not the “Christians.” In Arab Christian theology, denominations of Orthodox and Catholic churches, including “Rums” or “Byzantines”, mentioned in the Quran, as well as the Copts, Abyssinians, Assyrians, and Armenians, are distinguished from “Nazarenes”. The Nazarenes are members of an early sect or faction of Jewish Christians, who, contrary to Christian Church traditions, insisted on upholding the Torah and the Bible.

Note: This paper discusses the 2013 curriculum, and parts of a newer version.

First grade

According to the curriculum, “the infidels or unbelievers are condemned to hell.” Students hear adults say that “infidels” and idolaters or polytheists are easily associated with Christians or Nazarenes. One does not find any interpretation of the word “infidel”, which confuses Muslim and Christian children.

¹⁰² A paper presented at the regional conference, “Portrayal of Christians and the ‘Other’ in the Curricula of Regional Countries”, organised in Beirut by Al Quds Centre for Political Studies, and Danmission on March 4-5, 2016.

Implicit statements taught to students are more dangerous than explicit remarks. In his book, "Muslims Ask, Christian Answer", Christian Troll, a German professor for the study of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations, wonders: Are Christians are part of "People of the Book" or disbelievers who say "Allah is the third of three"? The Christian faith believes in one God, the creator of heaven and earth. Are they infidels for taking Jesus and his mother Mary "as deities besides Allah"? According to theologian and philosopher Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (1149-1209), no Nazarene sect believed in that. Are they idolaters or polytheists for taking Jesus as a deity besides Allah? The Quran clearly exalts Nazarenes above idolaters or polytheists (Surah Al Imran, 33, Surah Al Ma'idah, 82-83). These verses, studied by Muslim and Christian students, need to be interpreted in a way that enhances constructive and in-depth dialogue in order to avoid misunderstanding and mistreatment.

Third grade, part 1

Page 3: "Some of the Divine Books, such as the Torah and the Bible, were distorted. God pledged to protect and preserve the Quran (Surah Al Hijr, 9)."

This idea is wrong. According to the Quran, "the People of the Book" did not distort their Divine Books, and that is why they were deservedly described as the "People of the Book". Some verses of the Quran show the accuracy of the Divine Books (Surah Al Baqarah, 121, Surah Yunus, 94, Surah Al Ma'idah, 47). The distortion was indeed mentioned in the Quran, but not all Jewish or Nazarene sects were blamed for it. The Quran says: "Among the Jews are those who distort words from their [proper] usage...", and: "A party of them used to hear the words of Allah and then distort the Torah after they had understood it while they were knowing...". In short, this means a Jewish group misinterpreted the sacred text for their own gains.

Fourth grade

Pages 18 and 21: The curriculum cites a verse of Surah Al Bayyinah: "Those who disbelieved among the People of the Scripture and the polytheists...". The school textbook says: "The infidels among the People of the Book remained disbelievers until the prophethood [of the Prophet Muhammad] ...". Regardless of the fact that children do not understand the meaning of "the infidels among the People of the Book," including Jewish and Christian groups that did not believe in Muhammad, those could not have believed in him before the start of his prophethood.

Fifth grade

Page 42: "Love among Muslims." One does not find love towards the others.

Ninth grade

Page 18: "God cast the likeness/resemblance of Jesus on another person...". This an interpretation of verse 157 in Surah An-Nisa: "And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them." Al-Razi provided other interpretations, insisting on the crucifixion

of Jesus and that his foes were deluded into thinking he was slain, according to oral transmission. Al-Razi said “if the oral transmission of the Bible was denied and discredited, the same should apply to the Quran because it was also verified and reported by oral transmission.”

Christian education in Palestinian curriculum

Seventh grade (Latin Patriarchate of Palestine and Jordan)

Textbooks cites the *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Time) Deceleration of the Second Vatican Council on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions (1962-1964): “The Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one ... Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past...”

Unfortunately, these words full of love and good intentions are unrealistic and overoptimistic, portraying life between Muslims and Christians as an imaginary heaven, and disregarding difficulties and challenges. Christians of the Middle East faced almost a genocide, particularly in Iraq and Syria. The Christian education curriculum of the Latin Patriarchate remained 50 years behind time. The painful reality shows that radical Islamist groups funded by Arab and Western countries commit dangerous crimes. Luckily, the Islamic world in general, including Al Azhar, strongly condemns crimes and massacres committed against Muslims, Christians, Yazidis, and others.

Twelfth grade: Dialogue and pluralism

This pluralism fights totalitarianism. To the delight of Christians of Palestine, it was included in this year’s Christian education topic, and as part of the general secondary education examination.

Conclusion

A majority of the population is Muslim, and many of them have such ideas about Christians. For example, verses in Surah Al Fatihah, are they still interpreted that those who “earned God’s anger” were Jews, and those who went “astray” were the Nazarenes?

Many of the viewpoints expressed in the curricula, particularly in history, national education, and Arabic language textbooks, are deeply influenced by Islam. Everything is religion, and religion is everything. One does not mean that Islam itself is totalitarian, but it is wrong to exploit religion and make it totalitarian under the pretext that sharia governs life. It is all right that the Ten Commandments govern the society, but it is unacceptable to distort historical facts, exaggerate virtues of Muslims, and disregard Christians and their virtues due to misconceptions about the “exaltation of Islam”. “Allah is not shy of (telling you) the truth.” For example, as a Catholic priest, I cannot deny the depravity of some popes in a bid to preserve the “prestige” of the Church. Religion is based on principles, and history is about facts, and sometimes interests.

2. History and national education textbooks

Disregarding Christianity and Christians

History textbook of fifth grade, ancient civilizations:

When the book talks about the Roman Empire (starting page 63), it does not mention anything of significance about it, jumping to Islam, after briefly recounting how the empire was divided into the Eastern Empire governed out of Byzantium and the Western Empire governed from Rome.

Palestinian history textbook overlook the fact that Jesus was born and lived under the Roman Empire.

Unfortunately, a sixth-grade textbook in Hebrew translated into Arabic in 1984 and portraying Jesus as anti-Roman occupation dissident, is much better than the Palestinian curriculum, which ignores Jesus of Palestine.

The Palestinian curriculum simply ignored 1,317 years of history, from the founding of Rome in 753 BC, the nativity of Jesus, to the Year of the Elephant in 570 CE, when the Messenger of Islam was born.

- Half-truths about the affair of Caliph Umar and Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem.
- “The Frankish occupiers and colonists came from Europe”, but the Arabs arrived from the Arabian Peninsula in a Canaanite land, where the liturgical language of Syriac Christianity was spoken.
- Seventh grade, page 50: “[Sultan] Saladin cleansed the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque, removing images and crosses.” Removal of Christian symbols that “profane” Islamic holy sites.
- Justifying or overlooking injustices committed by Muslim rulers, such as the Mamluks or Ottomans.
- Demonizing the Catholic Church and clergy, honouring opponents such as John Calvin, Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and Henry VIII, and ignoring great reformist saints.
- In the Palestinian modern history, roles played by many Christian strugglers were disregarded. The same applies to leading Christian organisations running schools and hospitals, not to mention the Red Cross, on which the Red Crescent was based.
- Disregarding how the Israelis bombed Jerusalem churches in 1948.

In history books, researchers found around 90 pages of transgressions, muddling, ignorance, exclusion, and disregarding facts.

National education textbook, sixth grade:

Page 32: “Defining religion of the state ... all citizens are equal ...”

This is not possible. Jean-Jacques Walter wonders: How can all citizens be equal if some of them are not adherent of the state’s religion? That makes them second or third-degree citizens.

‘Homeland’, citizenship and national education

The word “homeland” does not appear in the Quran. But Islam’s holy book refers to “regions”, a word that is not part of the modern definition of homeland, with independent people and sovereignty. Based on that, the concept of citizenship, which the historic Marrakesh Declaration called for, does not exist in the Quran. Muslims and Christians need to better understand this concept, not as an idea contradicting the Quran, but as a necessity in this modern age.

The way Palestinian curricula boast about freedom and equality is mostly wishful thinking. It is sad to see that Arabs and Muslims flee to Europe in search of dignity, equality, and freedom, facing death by drowning.

Meanwhile, it is delightful that the textbook says something good about Christianity once in a blue moon. “Christianity promotes and calls for preserving human dignity and freedom, as well as tolerance, love, peace and harmony among people,” page 68 reads, inspired by the teachings of Jesus: “... love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”.

3. Arabic language curricula

- Imposition of Quranic verses on non-Muslims, as if they did not exist, as well as the rare citation of the Torah and the Bible under the pretext that they were distorted.
- Quranic phrases and words remain uninterpreted.
- Topics on Arabic literature discuss some pre-Islamic poets, such as Hatim al-Tai, without stating that they were Christian.

II. Identity and religion in the education process

On the cover of the national education textbook of the first grade, three male students and a female student stand to salute the Palestinian national flag. But the “homeland” topic is discussed in last part of chapter two of the book (pages 48-66). National and civil education textbooks realistically portray Palestinian identity, while the religion topic comes last, following the nationalism and Arab civilization sections. On page 11 of the national education textbook, the Dome of the Rock is pictured, as if it were Jerusalem’s sole landmark or symbol. The book should have been illustrated with a picture of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre next to the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa Mosque. Nevertheless, pictures showing Christian churches (without details) next to Muslim

mosques and other holy sites appear in textbooks of the third, fourth, and sixth grades. The textbook of the fourth-grade lists Muslim holidays, supported by Quranic verses, as well as “key Christian holidays” without any citation of the Bible, due to the popular belief that it was distorted (pages 21, 46, 47). On page 11 of the same textbook, readers find the question: “What does the picture of mosque and church symbolise or indicate?” The book, on page 49, indirectly commends mixed-sex education, showing male and female children sitting together on the same school bench.

The initial outcome, starting the first grade: Palestinian identity comes first before Arab and Muslim identities, with emphasis on masculine culture. As for Christians, no one cares.

Islam, however, greatly influences a majority of school subjects, including Arabic language, history, national education, geography, science, and mathematics.

In recent opinion polls on identity, respondents were asked: “Who are you?” and “what are you?” Four years ago, 70 percent of 1,000 Palestinian Muslims answered: “I am Muslim”, while 70 percent Palestinian Christians responded: “I am Palestinian.” Generally, in self-ruled Palestinian territories, and East Jerusalem, a majority of Muslims overlooks their national identity, while most Christians disregard their religious identity.

On page 10 of the seventh-grade national education textbook, the Palestinian identity is almost rigorously emphasised, without discussing Islam. “Activity/exercise 4: Let us understand the following text: Palestine is part of the Arab world, Palestinian people are part of the Arab nation, and Arab unity is a goal the Palestinians seek to achieve (chapter 1, article 1 of the draft statute law/constitution of the Palestinian National Authority, PNA).

Positive step

The word “nation” should be used in the nationalist, semi-secular, and European sense; not the Islamic and Quranic sense, “Ummah”, which exclusively refers to all Muslims around the world. A slogan of the late Jordanian King Hussein was: “Let us build this country, and let us serve this nation,” which means here the Arab-Muslim nation.

So, apparently, this idea is being adopted in the statute law/constitution of the PNA, which in principle represents all Palestinian people, particularly before the 2007 Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip, without discrimination, and without discussing religions and factions or sects.

According to Israeli Tel Aviv University Professor, Daniel Bar-Tal, school curricula significantly influence people. The powerful message of the Palestinian curricula to the majority of Palestinians is: Your first identity is Muslim, and the second is Palestinian. What Bar-Tal said is true because people obviously read nothing but school textbooks.

Palestinian identity crisis

The harsh reality of Palestine is reflected on the education process. The Palestinian people have suffered from military, political, and economic crises as well as a power struggle since 1948. It is difficult to defend the idea of “the unity of Palestinian people” under a single identity. Politically and administratively, geographical segregation is imposed on Palestinians. The issue of identity is taught to students under different curricula for “Arab Israelis”, East Jerusalemites, West Bankers, Gazans, and the Palestinian diaspora, who are rarely discussed in school textbooks.

Identity and religion in ‘Arab Israeli’ curricula

Following the Nakba, the Israelis found a way to obliterate the Palestinian identity, calling Palestinians “Arab Israelis” under the pretext of distinguishing them from “other Arabs” surrounding Israel. Those should have been called “Palestinians of Israel”, but the word “Palestine”, obviously, terrifies many. Greek historian Herodotus (484-425 BC) wrote of a “district of Syria, called Palaistinê”, and Roman Emperor Hadrian decided to rename the province of Judaea; for its new name, he chose “Syria Palaestina” in response to the Bar-Kochva revolt. Palestinian students do not know anything about Hadrian, who imposed the name “Palestine” on history.

The Israeli government discriminates between Arabs and Druze, who speak Arabic. Druze have their own non-Christian and non-Islamic beliefs, declaring the conception of the deity to be one of strict and uncompromising unity. Unlike the majority of Palestinian citizens of Israel, Druze are fully drafted into the military, and loyal to the Hebrew entity.

Obliteration of Palestinian identity

The word “Palestine” does not exist in the Arab Israeli curricula, which instead use the term “land of Israel”, contrary to centuries-old facts. Since 1980s, Christian school principals protested in vain against Christian faith and history textbooks translated from Hebrew, depicting Jesus as anti-Roman revolutionary (sixth grade, page 135).

A year ago, the Israeli Ministry of Education proposed a textbook covering all religions and faiths in Israel, in a bid to “promote coexistence”. Sharing its ideas and proposals with public and private schools, the ministry asked religious leaders to present and introduce their own faiths. I had the honour of correcting some errors about an introduction to Christianity, and was asked to read an introduction to Islam. I noticed that there was an attempt to obliterate Palestinian identity in parts discussing the origins, roots and history of Islam. The content had information on Hijaz, the entire Arabian Peninsula, and tribes, but lacked details on Palestine and its holy sites under Islam. The solution was to enhance the Palestinian Islamic elements in the text.

Denial of the Nakba, and calling it the “liberation war”, is a dictatorial and totalitarian act imposed on the Palestinians. The Palestinians are the true victims of the so-called “liberation”, which in 1948

displaced three quarters of the Palestinian people, or 750,000 people, and destroyed hundreds of towns and villages.

The same curricula focus on the Holocaust.

Grave consequences

Due to practical necessities and interests, as well as disappointment with the Arab world, a large number of Palestinians, particularly Christians, succumbed to pressure and accepted the “Arab Israelis” naming, forgetting the injustices, expulsion, displacement and pillage, committed against them, their fathers and their grandfathers. Some of those are still alive, while others decided to replace the “unimportant” Arabic language, with Hebrew.

The identity crisis is still creating serious problems, including Judaization, emigration, and repression.

The phenomenon of “Christian Arameans”

Four years ago, Gabriel Naddaf, a Greek Orthodox priest, formed an “Association of Christian Arameans”, disavowing not only Palestine, but also Arabism. Naddaf called for integration of Arab Christians in all Israeli state institutions, including military and national service, under the pretexts that Muslims in Israel mistreat Christians. He completely ignored the decades-old, and ongoing suffering of Christians and Muslims. Failure of Arab Israeli curricula to fairly present the history of Jesus and Christianity in the Holy Land, as well as “Islamisation of the education process” helped Naddaf promote his plans. There is no justification for his actions. The injustices against Christians should be addressed by court of law, and Islam does not prevent people from becoming bilingual in Aramaic and Arabic -- which is the case in Syria and Iraq.

Obliteration of Palestinian Christian identity, and distortion of Muslim-Christian relations in the Holy Land

The curricula all over Palestine disregard the Christian history (first seven centuries AD), creating identity crisis for Christians and making them wonder if they belonged to this land. As a result, Christians developed a powerful ideology that encourages them to emigrate. They are influenced by illogical thoughts in the Palestinian curricula that “this land was Canaanite before it became Islamic,” or by Arab Israeli textbooks claiming that “this land is Jewish with a Muslim minority”. Such policies constitute an “ideological genocide”.

In April, 2016, the ruins of a Byzantine church in Gaza were completely razed. Back then, I wrote in Al Quds newspaper: “No wonder ... Palestinian university and school textbooks razed centuries of history. Average Palestinians and perhaps a majority of Palestinians, including Christians, are not familiar with the word ‘Byzantine’ or the history of churches, except for what the Islamic history and Quran tell them about the Rums.”

Meanwhile, Palestinian Muslims remain confused about their relations with Christians. Three quarters of people in the Gaza Strip, Mount Hebron, and Negev never bump into a Christian in a lifetime. Muslims ask themselves: "Are our neighbours Christian, Nazarene, infidel, part of People of the Book, or Dhimmi?"

Palestinian Muslim identity crisis

Palestinian Muslims face a series of dilemmas. Religious and other traditions insist that "Islam is above all", but at the same time, Palestinian Muslims find themselves humiliated and repressed under occupation. Arab and Islamic history does not acknowledge failure. Instead, colonists, Zionists, Crusades, and Franks are blamed, regardless of how we suffer from our own infighting and treason.

All of this widens the gap between the past and present, and between reality and ideals, particularly that students these days read many things on the Internet that contradict their school textbooks. Torn apart, Arab Christians develop a type schizophrenia and complexes.

This obliteration of identity is reflected on how people dress and talk. Christians are obsessed about their clothes and speaking a "modern dialect", while Muslims replaced traditional clothes with Islamic dress. The Palestinian national identity and characteristics, discussed sometimes in textbooks, are lost.

Conclusion

When the curricula turn national identity into religious or Islamic identity, Christians become a group of unequals or almost non-existent. As a result, many students avoid public and Christian schools teaching the government-imposed curricula. Parents refuse policies of marginalisation and Islamisation, replacing the Arabic language, "container of Islam's message", with English and French languages. They feel comfortable with Western or foreign curricula that do not offend and defame the church, or impose Islam, focusing on science and technology. The same phenomenon applies to many Muslims and Christians in the Gulf region.

The way Islam is being presented (which has nothing to do with the faith itself) obliterates or distorts the Canaanite identity of the Palestinian people by limiting it to Arabism. The first reason for Arabisation of identity is that we, Canaanite "Arabs", wanted to prove our Palestinian rights to the land, although being Canaanite was enough to demonstrate that truth. The second reason is our love for Islam, the Arab Prophet Muhammad, and Arabic Quran. But the first reason is a point of weakness. Proving our rights as Canaanites and people of Palaistinê is better than demanding these rights from Islamic or Christian perspectives. The Jews can easily show that their faith is older than our religions and that they were ahead of us historically.

Whether we like it or not, our homeland unites us, but religion divides us, regardless of our good intention. So, "... come to terms common between us and you ... (Surah Al Imran, 64)",

acknowledging and overcoming our differences in order to “... live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness ... (1 Timothy 2:2).

III. Education law reform

On paper, there are no discriminatory legislation, but in many cases reality is different. In recent years, schools, including Christian educational institutions, for Arab Israelis and Palestinians under the PNA, started to face growing restrictions. While the Palestinian education ministry does not provide any funds for schools, particularly Christian educational institutions, it demands financial statements and reports, as well as taxes. No one can predict the outcome of such harassments. At the same time, it looks like the Israeli Ministry of Education is trying to shut down private schools, which are mostly Christian. Also, some Palestinian education officials would like to see these schools closed or directly managed by the ministry. In other words, it is a sort of undeclared nationalisation.

Palestinian laws do not prevent Christian teachers from teaching students Arabic language and history. But Christian university students feel uncomfortable learning about Arabic language and history for the aforementioned reasons.

In the Gaza Strip, according to father Jorge Hernandez, former pastor of Holy Family Parish in the enclave, Hamas wants, officially or unofficially, to replace the word “homeland” with (Islamic) “nation”, leaving Christians out of the equation. Insisting on shutting down mixed-sex schools, Hamas, two years ago, ordered male teachers to stop teaching female students, and instructed female teachers to refrain from educating male students. The instructions however were too difficult to be implemented.

Conclusion

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem has been criticising negativities for decades, and thoroughly taught us history. The Franciscan Friars, particularly archaeologists such as the late Belarmino Bagatti, highlighted the significance of Christian holy sites, villages, and old cities of Palestine. History book failed to mention such facts. On Father Nazih Hayek’s request, Monsignor George Saba wrote a book for schools on issues in the history of church since. Also, A. Damarjian wrote in 2014 about the history of the Holy Land in the early period of Christianity, and cooperated with a local committee to draft a history booklet correcting errors in Palestinian history textbooks. The General Secretariat of the Christian Schools in Palestine, and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem printed Damarjian’s books and distributed them among teachers of history, national education, and Christian education. Last year, Damarjian drafted a special edition with illustrations, and images for sixth-grade students.

Unfortunately, we have to acknowledge that a majority of Christian education teachers and their colleagues did not comply with instructions of the general secretariat and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The reason could be negligence, carelessness, stereotypes, or fear of education ministry inspectors.

We cannot change the curricula as the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem has been trying in vain since 1950s to correct textbook errors. A new panel was formed last month, grouping a Catholic priest. Although we still have a long way to go, we envy Jordan for achieving some progress in this regard, thanks to the wisdom of King Abdullah II.

The realistic question is: What's next? Hopefully, all the best.