

MEDITERRANEAN ECHOES

January

2013

From Egypt

Update Egypt Dec. 13/12

The Christian delegation in the Constituent Assembly eventually withdrew as did most liberal groups as a protest that it was dominated by the Islamists.

An interesting note is that recently at a meeting the Patriarch's delegate told us that an Egyptian Council of Churches is being set up and that literally the leaders of all denominations were in favor of the idea. This is very good news - and the churches have been speaking with one voice throughout this crisis.

Only yesterday Dec. 12 the Opposition finally said it will not boycott the referendum but is encouraging people to go and vote NO.

Up until now it was understood that people could vote wherever they were and that it wasn't necessary to go to the city or town where one's identity card was issued. Two days ago however it was said in the papers that people must vote in their own places. This is very difficult because of the huge numbers of young people from Upper Egypt who are studying or working in the cities. The Moslem Brotherhood will probably provide transportation for this (as they did for the demonstrations, as well as money!)

Slowly we've become aware of more people that we know who have participated in opposition demonstrations: Mina, a young physiotherapist from Berba; a young woman we know who is doing an experience with a religious Congregation ("because I'm Egyptian" she said!) along with several Jesuits, Marilyn, a friend of mine whose job at the Dutch Embassy is reading the Egyptian papers and giving a summary in English to the Dutch staff... she is married to Irish man and mother of 2 teenagers. Also a few days ago we learned that Faiza NDS went to the Sidi Gaber demonstration in Alexandria along with a young woman living with the community.

No one doubts that the "pro" lobby will use whatever means possible to win the YES vote, including various kinds of vote rigging, as became clear during the Presidential election. More or less everyone you talked to had stories of misconduct that they had seen at polling stations at that time.

Darlene (Cairo)

A New Option For the Ecumenical Prayer Garden in Jerusalem

We are about to close one little chapter of Zion's story in Jerusalem, but it has a happy ending, with much promise for the future. This concerns the Ecumenical Prayer Garden on the Mount of Olives.



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According to the records on file, this piece of land was bought Mother Godeleine in 1936. About 1960, Sr. Aline submitted a quest to the Jordanian government for a permit to build on however, the file contains no indication that the permit was ever granted. The next historical note is dated January 19, 1979 when an agreement was signed with the "Committee the Foundation of the Ecumenical Prayer Garden," in New York. According to the files, the agreement was for ten years

and was to be renewable twice. The inauguration of the Ecumenical Prayer Garden was planned for May 15, 1980. The New York Community Trust has, over the years, provided some funding annually for the maintenance of the Garden.

By 2009, it was clear that the Garden, though maintained well, was no longer attracting visitors, so we entered into negotiations for a new project on the site. Consequently, we had to inform Mr. George Gowen of the New York Community Trust (NYCT), that we were not in a position to consider renewing the agreement for another ten years, but would be pleased to continue our shared commitment to the Garden on a year-by-year basis. The project that had prompted us to take that step did not materialize; however, the initiative we had taken opened the possibility of considering other options. We must now inform him of the termination of the Ecumenical Prayer Garden commitment and the new options emerging.

Needless to say the negotiations between the Holy See and the State of Israel, and particularly the prospect of having to pay taxes on an uninhabited property, or of risking that this piece of land will be declared a national park -- which is happening to many such properties now in the context of Jerusalem Urban Planning -- have given us questions about the wisdom of keeping this land (nearly 5 dunums, or 5000 square meters) on the Mount of Olives. A year ago, we learned of the Patriarchate's interest in obtaining properties for construction of housing or related projects for Palestinian Christians. Rose Theresa looked into this possibility for our site, but there was no follow-up. We were also aware of the impressive projects of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land along the same lines. Rose Theresa contacted the Custos, Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, and a project began to take shape immediately in our appointments with their lawyer and later their Bursar. The Franciscans own other larger properties on the Mount of Olives, destined for construction of housing for Palestinian Christians. They proposed alternate projects on our little piece of land, in service of the population that will eventually reside on the slopes of the Mount -- an extensive kindergarten perhaps, or a sports center, or possibly a Franciscan Media Center for the Church of Jerusalem. This so beautifully expands the potential for this property that, in dialogue with the CLT, and specifically with the encouragement and delegation of Oonah, we have proceeded with the negotiations and will sign the contract for the sale of the property in January.

This will also bring to an end the contract of Mr. Ibrahim Kweiss, who has been the guardian and gar-

dener of the site for the past twenty years. He is now seventy years of age. When Rose Theresa and I visited him on December 3 to tell him of these developments, he was amazingly supportive of the change, acknowledging that the property is no longer used and that the Franciscans, whom he knows, will develop it well.

This feels like good news, from our perspective, and we hope that you too can support this decision.

Diane (Beit Ruth)

*for the Properties Committee: Rose Theresa, Diane, and Brother Elio Passeto
December 28, 2012*

From Tunisia

The Jewish feast of Chanukah celebrated at La Goulette

24 December 2012



The Jewish feast of Chanukah (or the festival of light) was celebrated on Sunday 16 December at La Goulette, a multifaith capital. On that evening, the last evening of Chanukah was celebrated in a festive, friendly atmosphere - a festival which commemorates the restoration of the altar of offerings in the Second Temple of Jerusalem.

Dar El Dhekra

Dar El Dhekra, an association for the safeguard and restoration of the Judeo-Tunisian heritage, had invited members and friends - regardless of religious affiliations - to light the lights of Chanukah, the festival of light and hope.

Among those present were the United States Ambassador, the German Ambassador, the French Ambassador, and representants of the civil authorities, as well, of course, as representants of the Israeli ministry for religion, including the very young rabbi of La Goulette, who came from Djerba for this mission.

Government authorities and directors of the « troika » in power (Ennahdha, Congress for the republic and Ettakatol) were officially invited by the organisers, but did not deign to respond to the invitation, nor to send representants.

On this occasion, Dar El Dhekra presented an ambitious programme of cultural activi-

ties, and inaugurated the beginnings of a Museum of Judeo-Tunisian History.

Thus was announced for 10 January next, an exhibition on the alimentary customs of Judaism, and a study of points of similarity between Kashrut and Hallal.

On 24 February there will be an exhibition on « The Just Ones of the Maghreb » accompanied by testimonial films, and lectures.

In May, there will be a meeting on the theme of « The sources of Maugrabin music », bringing together images, photos, texts, partitions, objects and instruments. A CD is to be compiled of Judeo-Tunisian music and songs, and a concert will be recorded, with modern interpretations, of the songs of the Judeo-Maugrabin tradition.



Tunisian Judaism in conjunction with all times

At the beginning of next term, there will be an exhibition of Judeo-Tunisian craftsmanship, and it is proposed to open a centre of formation.

The year will end with an art exhibition, on the theme « Tunisian Judaism in conjunction with all times ».

Among other activities, Dar El Dhekra has suggested visits to the Great Synagogue of Tunis, to Ghriba, to Djerba or the Jewish cemetery of Tunisia. These would all be festive, friendly ways of re-discovering a common history.

Orfi (common law) marriage in Tunisia

Common law marriage (ôrfi) seems to be gaining followers in young Salafist milieus.

Common law marriage, or “Orfi” marriage, is a new phenomenon in Tunisian society. Although it is difficult to compile a register of such cases, the phenomenon can be perceived more and more in the areas surrounding the capital and in other large cities.

What is “Orfi” marriage?

It is a marriage contract that is formally signed by a man and a woman in the presence of two witnesses. According to the Personal Status Code, this mar-

riage is illegal, for there is no commitment between the husband and the wife that binds the couple.

This type of marriage does not include a civil contract, it is not recognized by law, and it transforms the women into wives in abeyance, with children who are not recognized and have no identity.

The woman is deprived of her most fundamental rights, of which the most important is that of being recognized as a wife; for society considers her to be a celibate mother, as it is difficult to prove her rights before a court, and consequently, in the absence of juridical documents, she loses the right to receive an allowance for food.

The children's situation

With the adults losing out in this situation, the children are considered to be illegitimate, since it is difficult to prove their filial relationship, as the father refuses responsibility in their regard. The mothers are not able to register their children or to acquire birth certificates without a formal marriage contract. The result is that the children cannot register at school, because their names do not exist in the civil registries.

The young people's situation

According to a study carried out in five Tunisian universities, more than 80% of couples are choosing this union that has no juridical value and that is above all illegal and can be broken at any time. 800 orfi unions, concealed from all, are said to be registered in Tunisia; however, this number is difficult to prove because so much discretion surrounds the matter.

It seem that this “*fashion*” started because of the difficult and precarious situation of Tunisian youth... But what will become of the woman under these conditions?

In Egypt “Orfi marriage has become a real phenomenon recently, with 4,100 marriages contracted in 2008, of which 17% are those of students.”

These numbers reveal the growing tension between a rigid society and a population that wants to live out its youth to the full.

Agnès (Nabeul)

From Ein Karem

The life of our communities in Ein Kerem



You heard probably that our three communities welcomed a couple associated to the brothers of Sion: Luciano and Cema (Luciano has already been with us 9 months and Cema 4 months)

Luciano is a permanent deacon and serves as such in our liturgies. He loves to work in the garden and is very competent for all kind of works in the house. Cema is very appreciated in the kitchen.

They have in Brazil two daughters, 22 and 20 years old and 2 grand-daughters. Very generous they enrich a lot our community life.

Carlos, brother of Sion, will join the community of the brothers in February 2013.

Meanwhile he works as secretary for the Spanish Biblical program.

Phil will be part of the community of the apostolic sisters from March 2013

And Claudia arrived in the contemplative community this week

All those arrivals make us very happy and we thank the sisters and brother welcomed for their generosity

Emy, Colette, Kasia, Anne-Catherine

Message from the Moslem community in Lyons to the Christian community

On this Christmas Eve, when our Christian sisters and brothers are preparing to celebrate the birth of Christ, at a time when each of them will be able to live intensely these moments of prayer and joy in their families, we would like to send them, in the name of the Moslem community in Lyons and the region, a message of peace and brotherhood, and our wishes of happiness, health and wellbeing for them, their families, and all their loved ones.

In these troubled times, with the difficulties of everyday life, so distressing and hard to bear, we appeal to all believers to find in their hearts the strength of patience and courage, and conviction, that will enable them to continue to offer love and respect rather than the hatred and rejection others are trying to impose upon them.

It is in the proximity of the Most Merciful One that all believers will find within themselves the peace that will free them from exterior fears.

May the year 2013 which is opening before us be a year of peace, serenity and mutual respect. Long may these shared convictions, which are our strength, invite us to redouble our efforts and our teaching, so that ever more and better, in our differences, we may be citizens of one and the same destiny.

Happy Christmas ! Happy New Year ! and always... our best wishes for your happiness...

Lyons, 24/12/2012

Kamel KABTANE, Rector of the Great Mosque of Lyons

Azzedine GACI, Rector of the Mosque of Villeurbanne

Abdelkader BENDIDI, Rector of the Mosque of saint Fons

From Aubagne

The interfaith and non-religious group in Aubagne.

On Tuesday 13 November 2012, Mgr Tessier, former bishop of Algiers, and the Rector Gaci of the mosque of Villeurbanne led a day for peace between Christian and Moslem communities in our country and in Algiers.

In the morning, three classes of one of the technical colleges in Aubagne watched the film « Of gods and men ». This was followed by questions from the students, answered by Mgr Tessier and members of the interfaith group.

Between 12.30 and 3.00pm, during a meal offered by the municipality of Aubagne, our two guests conversed freely with members of the interfaith group.

From 3.30 to 5.00pm, during a meeting in the mosque, our two guests were able to reply to a fire of questions asked by Aubagne Moslems.

From 6.30 to 8.30pm there was a round-table on the theme of « Men, their belief and peace », in the magnificent, restored « Chapel of Black Penitents », kindly put at our disposal by the town, which also took care of the practicalities.

This round-table was conducted by Mr Christian Apotheloz, journalist, and fully lived up to expectations, in the presence of 150 people.

In spite of all the difficulties, the message, full of hope, of these two men of the church was heart-warming for all present.

If you would like more details, you have only to ask, I will be pleased to give them to you.

Geneviève (Aubagne)