

## **Protestants and Catholics: The War of Religion in Laxe in Sfax**

(From Diaspora Sfaxienne 2006, pp228-229 )

I had the "privilege" to belong to a tiny minority: that of the Protestants, who could literally be counted on the fingers of one hand... and yet, in the day before the war, we had a pastor in Sfax, Mr Febvre, who, every Sunday met us before the "Worship" (Protestant name of the mass) for "Sunday School", (a form Protestant of catechism), in the Temple of which I never worked out the reasons for its construction, given our low numbers. There were however certain families very attached to their religion of which family Chatel-Bureau. It seems to me that one of the girls of this family was called Idelette.

We had a formation very different from that of our Catholic comrades because, at our place, everything rests on the Bible from which we learned the verses by heart, from which the pastor explained us the doctrines of the religion, but there were no obligatory requests and answers, freedom being the essence of Protestantism. I acknowledge that I did not much like to learn the verses which I read at any speed while returning to with the temple and in addition, as it was rare that I would be questioned first, my excellent memory allowed me to recall the recitations of the others.

We sang also canticles and the pastor had had the idea of permitting each one to choose "his" song, which belonged solely to him for the year. I believe that as a fine pedagogue our choice was to help us to know it better? I still know very well the verses of "my" canticle. There were some disadvantages in being Protestant in this town of Sfax where the European population was savagely and deeply Catholic, with a religiosity of the Italian type, where the ornaments, the genuflection, the multiple signs of cross and all the pageantry contrasted with the Temple which had wood benches with only one austere cross and where the pastor in a black robe remained rather close to the image of Calvin.

A disadvantage initially for the girls: I acknowledge to have envied my comrades with their scents, the veil, alms, etc... each family having at heart to dress its communicant as well as possible and it was all the more pretty as they were young, often 10-11 years. And for us there was none of that: always the austerity, more especially as our communion was done late, because the intention was that we properly understand the significance of it and that we were sufficiently informed. Thus I made my communion the year of my 16th birthday, whereas I was in Philosophy and I must say that I was attacked by scruples and fears that I would not have had as a younger person.

The second nuisance was the attitude of Sfaxiens Catholics who were persuaded that I was not Christian, which put me in a fury but I regained all my superiority thanks to my knowledge of the Bible and in particular of the Old Testament. Fortunately the Priest, Abbot Descroix, had a large spirit and did not fail to bless (visit) our apartment like that of the neighbors.

You will be able to see in the text of Genevieve Pauline hereafter that not everyone had so generous a spirit... In any case, I had my tally of Masses after the arrival of the law of Marshal Pétain: for for any reason at all they followed us to the Mass: I still have the memory of Marinette Azemard, her beautiful blond hair spread on her shoulders, praying with enthusiasm on her knees, down to the floor... Happily all that never tamed my faith and with the willingness of the current Church to reject what there was of the theatrical in its ceremonies I pray just as easily with the Eglise (Catholic church) as with the Temple, conscious and happy of the desire of union between the Christians.

**Michelle CONSTANT-JOURDAN**

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**The point of view of a young Catholic**  
**"On the side of the small girls"**

We sauntered, I remember, to go downtown, from the School Amédée Gasquet (in Picville); we were going to follow the burial of a small unknown girl.

Pirandello describes the slow procession of the "Orfanelle" which served almost uniquely for this purpose. Then, they followed all the notable burials, in gray robe, the hair tied up, a candle in hand, the flame held under the burning sun of Agrigente.

We served also as a choir, a uniquely patriotic choral society. For any reason at all, our director whose husband had been a prisoner of war (the war of 14...) took us around the kiosk of "Harmonie Sfaxienne". We gave all our voices to sing the Marseillaise, or better the Song of the Departure. The class, that I say, the whole school went to the town to see a film or to listen to a conference. I remember Golgotha being given around Easter. Our Director had said seriously to young Jewish children to avoid the spectacle: "You would be likely to be molested by your Catholic comrades"

A recommendation, then not superfluous, alas. There was, in fact, a war of religion. The daughter of the pastor (a very political pastor) had thus asked me one day: "How many blessed virgins do the Catholics adore?" and I answer him proudly: "I know at least four of them: the Virgin of Doors, the Virgin of Trapani, the Virgin of Pompeii, the Virgin of Salette. But it must have others," I added modestly. When I reported this matter to my mother... I believed that she was going to have an attack, her face grew so inflamed. "There is only one Virgin, do not forget it, from now on ***no longer frequent the Protestants!***"

I followed her council so well that I had gone to propose to Monseigneur Giudicelli (a white beard seen through the lattice of the confessional) to kill a Protestant comrade; the softness of Monseigneur surprised me, but my murderous madness lasted a few months.

Of course, nothing came to distract us from our obsessions: nuns or love. The sport was ignored. We could, with the discipline, to bathe us, but we were to remain with range... in sight of our mother or our innumerable aunts.

P. Genevèse (p229)