



The ICCJ Conference in 2013 in Aix-en-Provence: It's over!

31.08.2013 | Rosine Voisin

From June 30 to to July 3, the 2013 ICCJ conference on “Secularity/Laïcité” took place at Aix en Provence, France. Rosine Voisine, member of the Amitié Judéo-Chrétienne de France wrote the following short report. Rosine Voisin’s short report is originally in French; English version: Debbie Weissman

Two years of preparation, including the last six intense months, working with a small but cohesive and effective team for four days of great intensity and quality: The ICCJ (International Council of Christians and Jews) 2013 conference in Aix-en-Provence was a great success.

Some figures to start with:

- 205 participants registered. We had to close registration before the end of May and turn down many in June, since the main hall could not accommodate more than 200.
- 100 French and about 125 French speaking participants (including the neighbors of France: Belgians, Swiss, Italians and Spaniards, the French speaking Canadians and a few others).
- 20 countries represented in addition to France, from nearby European countries to more distant ones such as New Zealand, Australia, the USA, Israel, Argentina and Brazil.
- 4 plenary sessions following the opening session. An opening session with a tribute to Jules Isaac’s life and work by Edouard Robberechts, We listened to a moving recording of the voice of Jules Isaac.
- 18 workshops spread out over three sessions, in French or English.

The Catholic Church of France was represented by six bishops: Archbishop Pontier, Archbishop of Marseille, President of the Conference of French Roman Catholic Bishops; Bishop Dufour, Archbishop of Aix-en-Provence; Bishop Dagens, one of our key note speakers; Bishop Beau (Auxiliary Bishop of Paris, representing Cardinal Vingt-Trois, the predecessor of Bishop Pontier as president of the Conference of Bishops of France); Bishop Jordy (president of the Council for Christian Unity and the Relations with the Jews) and Bishop Deniau, Bishop Emeritus of Nevers.

Many pastors of the United Protestant Church of France were also present, in addition to Florence Taubmann, President of AJCF (Amitié Judéo-Chrétien de France.) Especially to be mentioned are

Alain Massini, representing the Protestant Federation of France, Gilles Pivot for the PACA Region and the Aix Christian pastor Davaine. Also present was Rabbi Chaim Korsia, who gave a brilliant lecture.

As usual, the conference brought together a diverse audience of many leading academics, representatives of ICCJ member organizations and grass-root activists in Jewish-Christian dialogue, all in a warm atmosphere, facilitating informal exchanges, with the quality of the program essential to the success of such an event. In addition to lectures and workshops on the theme of secularism, tours and excursions outside the wonderful host site of La Baume were provided to:

- The Camp des Milles, one and only of the more than 200 concentration camps in France still standing. After a tour of the camp, short lectures by the President of the Camp des Milles Foundation, Alain Chouraqui (on the history of Camp and the current site) and Father Patrick Desbois (on "Genocide and Modernity") impressed the participants.

- Guided tour of the beautiful city of Aix-en-Provence, followed by a reception hosted by the City of Aix, in the beautiful park Pavillon Vendôme. Assistant Mayor, Ms Merger, in charge also of European relations, representing Mayor Ms. Joissains, paid a moving tribute to Jules Isaac, founder of the Amitié Judéo-Chrétien de France, to whom the conference was dedicated on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of his death.

- A farewell dinner at the Auberge La Bastide, near Les Milles, a typical Provencal place, was a pleasant time in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Beau Bishop read a moving message from Cardinal Vingt-Trois, Pastor Massini read a message on behalf of Pastor Francis Clavairoly, as of October 1, President of the Protestant Federation of France.

During this dinner, Debbie Weissman, President of the ICCJ, presented to Pastor Dick Pruiksmas, ICCJ Secretary General, who will retire at the end of this year after a lifetime largely devoted to dialogue between Jews and Christians, the ICCJ gold medallion "Peace through Dialogue", an award initiated by ICCJ's Patron Sir Sigmund Sternberg. Rev Pruiksmas has been invited by the ICCJ Executive Board to serve the organization as a consultant in the years to come.

Now all the participants have gone home again, no doubt enriched by all the lectures, workshops and exchanges during these four very intense and sunny days. Sunny as promised!

The Conference of the ICCJ was preceded by two other conferences, that also were very successful:

- The conference of ICCJ's International Abrahamic Forum. The theme was the "teachings of contempt", words coined by Jules Isaac: From a teaching of contempt to a teaching of esteem.

- The Conference of ICCJ's Young Leadership Council, the YLC, of which a report will be published on the site.

Finally, we thank all those who contributed to the success of this conference, the staff of the ICCJ around Dick Pruiksmas, the AJCF volunteers, the AJCF director Bruno Charmet, members of the AJC group in the Provence Bernadette Avon and Robert Kauffman, and also Olivier Rota, Maddy Verdon, and all those not mentioned but who were willing to help us when asked. And we owe a big 'thank you' to Liliane Apotheker, chair of the conference planning committee.

Next year, the 2014 ICCJ conference will be held in Buenos Aires, the city of Pope Francis, before going to Rome in 2015 for the 50th anniversary of the declaration Nostra Aetate.