

Toumliline International Gatherings (1956-1966)

A Historical overview

October 1952: The Foundation:

The foundation of the Monastery in 1952 took place in a very specific time in the history of the Catholic Church in Morocco, linked to the arrival of Archbishop Louis-Amédée Lefèvre as Apostolic Vicar (head of the Catholic Church in Morocco).

The Archbishop completely reformed the Catholic Church in Morocco by first supporting the French Protectorates' authorities' decision to prohibit conversions. He then brought to Morocco intellectuals Christian Orders, like Dominicans and Jesuits, to open libraries and research centres. He also invited Orders dedicated to the service of the poorest, targeting among them Arab-speaking monks who had lived in the Arab world, to work with the most deprived populations of the cities, in the working-class districts and the shantytowns. **The new mission of the Catholic Church was no more to accompany the colonial forces but to witness the Christian faith in the land of Islam and to establish a dialogue with the Muslim religion as well as with the Moroccan people.**

In February and April 1952, Archbishop Lefèvre supported Islamic-Christian dialogue in two texts he addressed to the clergy and to all the churches in Morocco, in which he demanded respect for the Moroccan people and for their rights, including trade unions. This position caused him to be invited to the Royal Palace for the Feast of the Throne on November 16, 1952, a tradition that continues for his successors to the present day.

The Archbishop's political stands were the implementation of H.S. Pope Pius XII's vision to establish an Islamic-Christian dialogue and to prepare for future African independence.

The founding of the Benedictine Monastery of Toumliline in October 1952 completed this objective. At that time, Sultan Mohammed Ben Youssef supported the project and sent H.R.H. Crown Prince Moulay El Hassan to the Monastery, barely a few months after its opening, to show the Sultan's public support to this initiative.

1952-1955: Connecting with the progressive Christians and the National Moroccan Movement:

The first Monastery's objective was to welcome monks as well as Catholics living in Morocco, for prayers and seminars. Catholic youth organizations, scouting movements, as well as families frequented the Monastery on religious celebrations.

Through those seminars, the monks established strong links with a group of French Catholics engaged in favour of Morocco's independence called the "French Liberals". The "French Liberals" movement was founded in December 1952, to protest against the brutal

repression of the popular riots in Casablanca and the arrests of the Moroccan trade union leaders. By managing to get on their side François Mauriac, the 1952 Literature Nobel Prize, and having him leading, together with the famous Islamologist Louis Massignon, the “*France-Maghreb Committee*”, they attracted an international audience.

The “French Liberals” then introduced the monks to the Moroccan National Movement. **Paul Buttin, Batonnier of Meknes**, played a decisive role in this connection: in fall 1954, he introduced the Moroccan Nationalist leaders, recently released from prison, to the monks: Mbarek Bekkaï, Fquih Mohammed Ben Larbi Alaoui (*Cheikh el Islam*), Driss M’hammedi (Paul Buttin’s associate at the Meknes Bar), Mohammed El Fassi, Mahjoub Ben Seddik, Abderrahim Bouabid and Mehdi Ben Barka.

Fquih Mohammed Ben Larbi Alaoui, President of Al Qarawiyine University, the theological Fes University, introduced R.P. Denis Martin, Prior of the Monastery, to Islam and they developed a solid friendship. The Fquih authorized the inhabitants of Azrou and its surroundings to attend the monks’ dispensary and work on their farms. He also allowed young interns to stay at the Monastery and middle and high school students from Azrou to join them on weekends to use the monks’ library.

In 1955, when Sultan Mohammed Ben Youssef returned from exile, the trust between the monks and the Moroccan Nationalist Leaders was already established.

Summer 1955: the contact with the Moroccan Youth:

In the summer of 1955, the Monastery welcomed Catholic youth and families, as well as passing guests. In the surrounding hills, a “Nationalist summer camp” was taking place, organized by the Youth of the Nationalist Party “Istiqlal”. The French military authorities decided to close the later due to the extreme political tension in the country after the Sultan’s forced exile.

The leaders of the “Nationalist summer camp” requested asylum at the Monastery for the children under their responsibility. The RP Denis Martin, head of the Monastery, and the monks accepted. As it was necessary to keep the youth occupied, the monks, the young Catholics and the Moroccan nationalist youth leaders invented workshops of debate, games, tournaments and musical evenings.

The monks recounted later how much the young Moroccan pupils and students were eager to understand their hosts and to learn from them. Visiting teachers gave a hand, and all together, they organized lessons, roundtables and debates. The interns from Azrou joined in, as did many young Catholics. These young people, despite the very strong tensions between the communities in the rest of the country, fraternized, learned to listen to each other, entertained, shared food and debated with the passion common to their age.

This exceptional moment was the first illustration of what will be, later on, called "the Spirit of Toumliline", characterized by a thirst for knowledge and mutual respect and led by youth.

1956 , Independence and state building:

A few weeks later, the Sultan Mohammed Ben Youssef returned to Morocco to immense popular jubilation. H.M. King Mohammed V honoured the “French Liberals” who “*had supported the Moroccan Independence while preserving the friendship between the two peoples*” by inviting them to the Royal Palace on December 1955, and Archbishop Lefèvre was one of them. RP Denis Martin received the homage of H.R.H. Crown Prince Moulay El Hassan, during his visit to Azrou in July 1956, when the Crown Prince invited him to his table.

RP Denis Martin had planned to organize a student summer session, modelled on the experience of August 1955, but the Moroccan side suggested an International Session, to attest the will of openness and dialogue of the new independent State. The “International Gatherings of Toumliline” were officially launched in August 1956, with the High Patronage of H.M. Mohammed V.

1957 : The three theologies enter into dialogue:

H.R.H Crown Prince Moulay El Hassan assumed the Chairmanship of the Organizing Committee of this session.

The interreligious dialogue of the “Abrahamic religions” was crucial for the organizers of the International Gatherings. The debates gathered Fquih Ben Larbi Alaoui, Father Peyriguère, (a Christian hermit living in El Kebab next to the Monastery), Louis Massignon and Emmanuel Levinas, who, together read the “Prayer to Abraham” written by Louis Massignon.

The three religions sought closeness and dialogue, associated with philosophy, anthropology, sociology or economics.

1958 : The format of the International Gatherings was adjusted every year, based on the previous experience: the first two years, 1956 and 1957, organizers limited themselves to one theme for each session, discussed over three weeks. The first year was overwhelming, with 58 courses, lectures and talks with no moderators; the second year was less busy, with “only” 28 encounters divided into workshops taking place in the afternoon, with a guest speaker. The workshops were in three languages: Arabic, French, English. This experience was not repeated probably due to its heavy costs.

1958 showed a clear effort to structure the International Gatherings: courses, round tables and debates, were organized by themes within the framework of 4 clearly distinct sessions, each session being supervised by 2 moderators. The organizers imagined a research session, which took place in July, reserved for experts and members of the Moroccan administration. Then three study sessions took place for almost three weeks in August, addressing students.

The organizers also convened leaders in the humanities, such as sociology, anthropology, history, law and economics, as well as political science, to deal with the contemporary issues Morocco was facing. The organizers invited speakers from international organizations, universities, the political world, trade unions or civil society, Moroccans, intellectuals from the Maghreb, Arabs, Africans, Europeans, Asians and North Americans. They also invited students from very different nationalities.

The courses, influenced by the “*College de France*” model, targeted students, but were also opened to a wider audience: teachers (secondary teachers, university professors), civil servants, members of the private sector, engineers, farmers, social workers, intellectuals, artists, politicians, trade unionists, diplomats and religious of the three religions of the Book, as well as Buddhists.

1959 : This International Gathering was organized by René Rémond, Professor at the National Institute of Political Sciences in Paris, and inspired by Abderrahim Bouabid, Minister in Charge of National Economy and Agriculture, as well as Professor Bauchet, former professor at the Law Faculty of Rabat. They created a very elaborate mode of organization, with a committee framing each courses and ordering the debates. There was no research session, but two study sessions reserved for students, as in 1958.

In 1960, the International Gatherings were renamed "International Meetings". They had been prepared for two years by Professor René Rémond, and were organized into three research sessions, each having a strict methodology. There was no student session and the debates were very technical. However, they still referred to “humanism” in the conclusion speech.

That year, the fall of the government lead by Abdellah Ibrahim could have led to the withdrawal of the government support, and in any case to the end of the very strong involvement of Abderrahim Bouabid, Minister of Finance, Vice-President of the Council.

1961 had only one research session and was the shortest International Gatherin/Meeting since 1956. This research session focused on the history of Morocco. It was alternating courses and debates, without commission nor workshops. The program of this International Gathering had to be rewritten, the Moroccan Government having expressed its objection to an “Islamology session” named "The history of the development of Islam in Morocco".

That year, the Monastery created cultural sessions on Christmas and Easter, language teaching sessions and exam review sessions for students.

In 1962, a new “Islamology session” was prepared by the Organizing Committee, with specialists from the Arab world, the Collège de France, the Institute of Islamic Studies of La Sorbonne, the Princeton and Harvard Universities. It was cancelled again.

On this date, the RP Denis Martin left Toumliline for Bouake in Burkina Faso for two years where **he founded an "International Toumliline Meeting in Bouaké"**, organized by the same Professor René Rémond and Serge Hurtig. In fact, the organizers simply transferred to Bouaké in 1962 and 1963 the sessions that had been cancelled in Morocco, including the debate on “Islamology”.

From 1963 until 1965, the monks organized International Gatherings that were culturally oriented, inviting academics, intellectuals and Moroccan artists to animate them, especially Mohammed Aziz Lahbabi and Jilali Gharbaoui.

In 1966, on his return, the R.P. Denis Martin created a "Meeting in Toumliline" which brought together Moroccan leaders of the political parties, intellectuals and artists.

The Meeting planned for the summer of 1967 on “The Youth” was cancelled and in June 1968 the Monastery closed its doors.

There is no doubt the International Gatherings of 1956 and 1957 were the most prestigious, enjoying the High Patronage of H.M. King Mohammed V, who insisted on receiving the delegates at the end of each session in his Palace in Rabat. The arrival in 1957 of HRH Crown Prince Moulay El Hassan and that of his sister Princess Lalla Aïcha were considerable events. These two sessions accompanied the enthusiasm of the Sovereign's return from exile and of the proclamation of Morocco's Independence. They illustrated the spirit of dialogue and openness of newly independent Morocco and contributed to its international influence. The national and international press, radios and televisions relayed these International Gatherings, and contributed to their prestige.

The International Gatherings of the years 1956 and 1957 are part of the dynamics Gatherings from 1956 to 1959. They were very ambitious by the extreme diversity of their contents as well as by the quality of the speakers and the participating universities and international institutions. The reconstruction of the programs, interventions and debates of these four crucial years has not yet been fully completed and still requires additional research to better understand the depth and the *avant-garde* dimension of the then-developed proposals for the Independent Africa.

The years 1960 and 1961 retained the same ambition and the same demand for quality, but those Gatherings began to be hampered by the political context. Thus, it appears that gradually, the International Gatherings, because of their original political dimension, were increasingly impacted by national and international political tensions. More in-depth studies remain also to be carried out on this subject.

It also appears that the RP Denis Martin, in front of these difficulties, decided to transfer to Bouaké in 1962 and 1963, the themes that he had not been able to organize in Toumliline.

The International Gatherings of 1963, 1964 and 1965, with a cultural vocation, while less prestigious, requiring fewer resources and attracting less media attention, still attracted a renewed generation of Moroccan intellectuals while meeting the aspirations of the Moroccan youth. These Gatherings, carried out by the monks in the absence of the RP Denis Martin, may reflect the inside tensions that appeared not only within the Monastery but also within the Catholic Church at that time, concerning its political role. More in-depth studies remain to be carried out on this subject.

The peculiar "Meeting in Toumliline" of summer 1966, welcoming political figures as well as intellectuals and artists can be seen as the ultimate gesture of RP Denis Martin to try to gather different political tendencies while at the same time accomodating the Monks' cultural positioning for the International Gatherings.

This document of the FMA is based on the work commissioned to the consultant François Martinet in 2018 and has been funded by the PISCA program of the Embassy of France in Morocco.

Summary of International Gatherings from / to Toumliline (1956-1966)

- **1956:** International Course from August 6 to 26 "La Cité"
- **1957:** International Course from August 1 to 22 "Education"
- **1958:** International Course from July 21 to August 25
Theme: "Tradition and Progress in Africa", **Canceled**
 - July 21 - 31 - research session: "The Municipality"
 - August 4 - 9 - study session: "The Basic Community"
 - 11 - 15 August - study session: "Teaching in Morocco"
 - 18 - 25 August - study session: "Contact problems"
- **1959:** International Course from 04 to 26 August: "Economic development"
 - August 4 - 13 - study sessions:
"The economic development of pre-industrialized countries"
"Relations between pre-industrialized peoples and already industrialized countries"
"The paths of economic development"
 - August 18 - 25 - study session: "Economic development and humanism"
- **1960:** International meeting from August 3 to 11: "The mobilization of human energies at the community level":
 - 3 - 5 August - research session: "The training of men"
 - 6 - 8 August - research session: "Administrative solutions"
 - 9-10 August - research session: "The political frameworks"
 - 11 August : Conclusion - start of a study session on Humanism: "Society, Person and Development"
- **August 1961:** International meeting from August 10 to 15: "The major problems in the history of Morocco"
Session of Islamology: "The Teaching of History in a Muslim Country": **Canceled**
- **August 1962:** International Meeting – Session of Islamology: "The history of the development of Islam in Morocco": **Canceled**
- **August 1963:** International meeting from 12 to 24 August - Cultural session: "The confrontation of cultures"
- **August 1964:** International Meeting - Cultural session: unknown theme
- **August 1965:** International Meeting - Cultural session: unknown theme
- **August 1966:** Meeting of August 11 - 20: "Human problems of development"
- **August 1967:** Meeting: "Youth": **Canceled**

1962-1963: International Meetings "Toumliline in Bouaké"

- **1962:** Bouaké
 - January 9-10 - Research session: "Tradition and Modernity in Black Africa"
 - October - Research session: "Primitive religions in black Africa"
- **1963:** Bouaké
 - April - Research session: "Islam in black Africa"
 - October - Research session: "Syncretism and Messianism in Black Africa"